

FORGING THE MASCULINE AND MODERN NATION: RACE, IDENTITY, AND THE
PUBLIC SPHERE IN CUBA AND MEXICO, 1890s-1930s

By

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For Tara, Chris, and Bill

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CHAPTER I

IMPORTING BARBARISM/STUDIED BARBARITY: NATIONAL IDENTITY AND PHYSICAL CULTURE FROM THE RIO GRANDE TO THE PORT OF

As night fell on the 21st of February, 1896, a tall and lanky New Zealander, Bob Fitzsimmons, climbed into a hastily constructed boxing ring to meet the Irishman Peter Maher on a mud bank in the Rio Grande. On the American side of the shallow river, Texas Rangers, powerless to stop the bout, gathered above the exposed rock cliffs with the Mexican residents of Langtry, Texas, dressed in their “bright costumes,” to watch the spectacle. Other “nervous” spectators, just off the long train and coach ride, crossed the water on a temporary footbridge to the sandy ground where the ring and small tents stood. They hoped, one observer remembered, to witness the boxing match before Porfirio Díaz’s troops arrived to stop and arrest them.¹

The isolation of this natural amphitheatre, hours from any sizable town, was chosen due to legal necessity as neither Mexican nor American. Straddling the physical border between the two countries, the uncertain jurisdiction of the site complemented the transnational reach of this media sensation of “racial” and masculine prowess and “physical culture.” In the weeks leading up to the bout, Mexican and American readers in Mexico City could marvel at the grainy

¹ The year-long legal battles to prevent the prizefight in Mexico and the United States entailed cross-border cooperation at the highest levels. In February of 1896, Governor Culberson of Texas met with Governor Ahumada of the Mexican state of Chihuahua in Juárez, Mexico to plan their collaborative efforts to shadow the “fistic carnival” on both sides of the border. Culberson, exercising a personal vendetta against the fight’s organizer, Dan Stuart, made it his personal mission to stop the fight. In 1895, he called a special session of the state legislature to outlaw Stewart’s proposed bout. “Anti-Prizefight Law Stowed Away,” *The Gazette* (Ft. Worth, TX), 5 October 1895. Telegram: J.G. Reagan to Culberson, February 21, 1896, *Records of Charles Allen Culberson, Texas Office of the Governor, Texas State Library and Archives; The Daily Herald* (Brownsville, TX) 13 February 1896; *The Houston Post*, 13 February 1896. See also Leon Miletich, *Dan Stuart’s Fistic Carnival* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1994), p. 78; W. W. Naughton, *Kings of the Queensberry Realm* (Chicago: The Continental Publishing Company, 1902). Chapters One and Two of this dissertation trace this early association with the film industry and the popular culture of boxing in Cuba and Mexico.

reproductions of the boxers' faces and shirtless bodies while they read how Díaz's crack troops shadowed the boxers and their entourage on the Mexican side of the border.² Presidents McKinley and Díaz reacted to the massive amount of public attention focused on the distant event by dispatching their armed forces on either side of the river to prevent the "barbaric spectacle."³ The public, lucrative, and popular exhibition of the "manly science" would be prevented by force, if necessary. For both executives, the idea that two men would meet in a prizefight on their territory was an affront to national dignity worthy of preemptive legislation, government sanctioned killing (shoot on sight orders), and other extreme threats.⁴ Journalists as far away as Panama and British Guyana commented favorably on this example of international cooperation.⁵

Thousands of spectators, despite and perhaps because of the misgivings of government, traveled on specially contracted trains from Mexico City and the Mexican/American border states to witness the match. Kinetoscopic technicians scrambled over the scrubby desert ground with their bulky equipment; they planned to film the bout and hoped the daylight would last long enough.⁶ Using the technological innovation of moving pictures, entrepreneurs sought to capture the drama of the prize fight and promised to make the nascent industry of professional sport even more lucrative by bringing it to a global audience. Moving pictures of boxing matches brought vivid images of masculine and "racial" idols to a new generation of lower-and middle-class

² Several Mexican newspapers, both in English and Spanish, carried coverage of the lead-up to the bout, such as: *Voz de México*, 4 August 1895; 10 September 1895; 14 September 1895; 4 October 1895; 22 February 1896; *El Monitor Republicano*, 3 October 1895; *Mexican Herald*, 22 October 1895; 10 February 1896; 11 February 1896. *El Imparcial*, 18 March 1897.

³ On even the rumor that a prizefight was to take place in Mexico and citing the recent anti-prizefighting legislation in Texas, the Mexico City daily *La Voz de México* beseeched the government to prevent the "barbarous and illegal" spectacle. If Americans had decidedly rejected that part of their "customs," Mexico should certainly do the same. *La Voz de México*, 9 October 1895, p. 2.

⁴ *Ibid*, Miletich.

⁵ *Estrella de Panama* (Panama City) 6 March 1896, p. 1.; *Daily Chronicle* (Georgetown, Guyana), 12 March 1896.

⁶ The kinetoscope was an early moving picture filming system, will be discussed later. Boxing matches were one of the first and most popular subject matters of early film, shown in the late nineteenth century in Cuba and Mexico.

spectators all over the hemisphere.⁷ Mexican theater entrepreneurs and promoters bid for the rights to show these boxing films; they were among the first full-length moving pictures shown in Mexico.⁸

The Mexican laborers who had constructed the makeshift ring under cover of darkness the previous night stood in anticipation alongside wealthy east-coast Americans in the gathering darkness.⁹ Investors had risked enormous sums over the previous six months in search of *any* place, on land or sea, where the fight could proceed. Newspapers in the United States and Mexico had dedicated thousands of inches of print and telegraph wires ran hot with messages updating the public on the latest events of this “fistic carnival.”¹⁰ The match’s promoters courted, and probably bribed, the local political elite of Ciudad Juárez so the boxers could train and live in Mexico. On the evening of the highly anticipated match, a special train carrying the boxers, aficionados, and vigilant police, left El Paso, Texas, bound for the mysterious location where the fight would be held.¹¹ The police on board had *carte blanche* to prevent the match

⁷ Ibid. Naughten, p. 219. The images of boxers such as John L. Sullivan, Fitzsimmons, and other ethnic heroes from the late nineteenth century were among the first mass marketed novelties that celebrated popular heroes to a broad, transnational audience. On the national impact of John L. Sullivan in the United States see: Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986) and Michael T. Isenberg, *John L. Sullivan and His America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

⁸ Some of Edison’s earliest films were of boxing matches. Not only were the films technically challenging to produce given the fast movement, film speeds, and lighting difficulties, they also had lucrative possibilities given the popularity of boxing for a mass audience of theater goers. Nancy Mowell Mathews, Charles Musser, and Marta Braun, *Moving Pictures: American Art and Early Film, 1880-1910* (Manchester, Vt: Hudson Hills Press in association with the Williams College Museum of Art, 2005); Dan Streible, *Fight Pictures: A History of Boxing and Early Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México, 1896-1930* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1983); *Cineteca D.W. Griffith, Griffithiana* (Genova: Cineteca D.W. Griffith, 1978).

⁹ The match, in generating enormous public attention, involved now legendary Westerners such as Wyatt Earp and Bat Masterson. Both of whom tried their hand as boxing referees in various matches leading up to the Fitzsimmons vs. Maher bout. See: Miletich, *Fistic Carnival*.

¹⁰ The boxers had even been voted “honorary Indian” status so the bout could take place on Indian territory; but threats from the federal government prevented the bout’s taking place in this area of uncertain jurisdiction. A subsequent idea was hatched to hold the match on an ocean going vessel out of the jurisdiction of the U.S. government in the Gulf of Mexico.

¹¹ As Paul Vanderwood, Jr. argues, the border in this period was a fairly ill-defined line that was crossed easily and often. See, among his many valuable works on the borderlands, Paul J. Vanderwood, *Juan Soldado: Rapist, Murderer, Martyr, Saint* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004).

from taking place on U.S. soil.¹² All of this was witnessed and relayed, detail by detail, to the reading public.

For many progressive legislators, journalists, and religious and civic leaders in the United States and Mexico, the practice of the “virile sport” was anathema to the higher civilization they imagined for the nation.¹³ Reformers were alarmed by the middle-class appropriation of formerly working-class, raffish preserves like boxing, through which urban men sought to exhibit vigorous masculinity and brusque sexuality.¹⁴ As R.W. Connell has shown, “sport has come to be the leading definer of masculinity in mass culture.”¹⁵ This study unearths the roots of this cultural engagement in modern Latin America. Though it may seem anachronistic to modern readers, the types of resistance to the cultures of modern sport clearly evident in the United States extended into Latin America where it showed clear similarities but also important differences.

In Mexico, similar critiques applied, but for the Porfirian elite the most rational course of action was to stop the “Anglo Saxon” cultural contagion at the border. As Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo has argued, for President Díaz and his positivist *científicos*, controlling diverse examples of cultural backwardness was an integral feature of the Mexican modernizing project: *pulque* drinking, bullfighting, and a new threat to civilization, boxing, were valid cultural sites for state intervention.¹⁶ For a small yet influential group within the Mexican elite, boxing was disdained

¹² Ibid., Miletich, *Fistic Carnival*.

¹³ Robert G. Rodríguez and George Kimball, *The Regulation of Boxing: A History and Comparative Analysis of Policies Among American States* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2009); Peter Benson, *Battling Siki: A Tale of Ring Fixes, Race, and Murder in the 1920s* (Little Rock: University of Arkansas Press, 1994).

¹⁴ Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-Vice Activism, 1887-1917* (Urbana: University of Illinois press, 2006), Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹⁵ R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 54. This study also draws important insights on the construction of manhood from Gilmore’s cross-cultural analysis: David D. Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

¹⁶ Pulque is an alcoholic beverage consumed historically by the lower classes and indigenous in Mexico. The consumption of this beverage and the bars where it is dispensed, *pulquerías*, have, since colonial-era Mexico, been

as the low-class counterpart of dueling, a practice that defined gentlemanly masculine honor.¹⁷

The modernizing pill was not swallowed whole by the Porfirian elite; a range of cultural preferences operated in the assignment of value (or the lack of it) in the public sphere to certain Euro-American derived cultural practices such as bicycle riding, fashion, literary tastes and the celebration of changing types of celebrity.¹⁸ The mass media, mirroring the ambivalence of the political elite, was split between those in the press who sought to protect the Mexican public from imported barbarity, and those who looked to the new “physical culture” as a necessary way to cultivate the modern masculine nation.¹⁹ Reactions to the bout on the border illustrated the conflict between the Mexican public sphere as consumers of transnational news and often improvisational government regulation that sought to control changing popular tastes.

contested by legislation, public health campaigns, and efforts at reforming the behaviors of the popular classes. While pulque and bullfighting were viewed ambivalently by the Mexican elite due to their links to indigenous and Hispanic heritages, respectively, boxing as both barbaric *and* foreign. See: Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fair* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 121. Tim Mitchell, *Intoxicated Identities* (New York: Routledge, 2004). For a contemporary account of anti-pulque campaigns see: Eugene Parsons, “Mexico,” in *The World Today* (Chicago: Current Encyclopedia Co, 1902), pp.1696-1697.

¹⁷For more on the evolution of dueling as an “honorable” and masculine pursuit for the Mexican elite during this period see: Pablo Piccato, “Politics and the Technology of Honor: Dueling in Turn-of-the-Century Mexico,” *Journal of Social History*, [Winter, 1999, Vol. 33], pp.331-354.

¹⁸Historians such as William Beezley, Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, and Pablo Piccato have made valuable contributions to understanding the interplay between cultural borrowing and the conscious modeling of Mexican society by the political elite during the Porfiriato. This study seeks to complicate their assertions by portraying a cultural arena that was controversial, problematic, and that engendered competing visions of acceptable and preferable modernity. See, for example, *Ibid.*, Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs*; and William H. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); and Pablo Piccato, *The Tyranny of Opinion: Honor in the Construction of the Mexican Public Sphere* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

¹⁹“Physical culture” (*cultura física*) was a broad movement within Latin America around the turn of the twentieth century. It was a quintessential syncretic borrowing from such diverse sources as European gymnastics movements, American boxing, and other sports. The changes in the way that manhood was conceived and expressed, shifting from the proving ground of military exploit to the mastery of self-defense and the “arte viril” is a process that forms the core of this dissertation. For early tracts on the importance of physical culture, especially as it related to the educational goals of Latin American states see: Congreso Nacional de Educación Primaria, *Informes presentados al Congreso Nacional de Educación Primaria por las delegaciones de los estados: del distrito federal y territorios en septiembre de 1910, al celebrarse el primer centenario de la independencia mexicana* (México: Impenta de A. Carranza e Hijos, 1911); Mexico, *Boletín de instrucción pública* (Mexico: Tipografía Economica, 1905), Vol. 5, pp. 980-85; Academia Nacional de Ciencias (México). *Memorias y revista de la Academia Nacional de Ciencias Antonio Alzate* (México, 1898); México, *La Enseñanza normal* (México: La Dirección, 1900); Consejo Nacional de Educación (Argentina), *El Monitor de la educación común* (Buenos Aires,1881).

In one of many direct orders to the governors of the border states, Díaz offered his opinion plainly: if the infamous bout were to occur on Mexican soil, it would be “depressing for the civilization of the nation,” yet during this period, Díaz himself attended carefully staged boxing matches in the capital that celebrated Mexican mastery of modern forms of sport as proof of military prowess.²⁰ Manuel Ahumada, Governor of Chihuahua, agreed with Díaz: he made a special trip to prevent the bout “under any circumstances.”²¹ While guiding Mexicans toward a positivist, Euro-American vision of order and progress, the Porfirian political elite would also assist their northern neighbors in suppressing one of the more shameful manifestations of their culture. No Mexican state had laws governing boxing or other violent sports; they relied on executive decrees to dissuade the public from the appropriation of the “Yankee shame.”²² This was one instance among many in which the positivist dictator and his political allies sought to stifle the autonomy of the public sphere in the name of civilization versus barbarity.²³ Modern sport, however, was rapidly implanting itself throughout Mexico via the growing, informal, and transnational channels of mass culture that adopted international norms of behavior, melding

²⁰ Josefina Miguel Flores, *Telegramas en el Archivo Historico, 1859-1912* (México: Centro de Estudios de Historia de Mexico CONDUMEX, 1988), pp. 140-142. Díaz also dispatched mysterious “agents” to the border to shadow the movements of the “fistic carnival” on the Mexican side. *La Voz de México* (Mexico City), 16 February 1896.

²¹ *The Mexican Herald* (Mexico City), 17 February 1896, p. 7.

²² The Mexican Herald cited Díaz’s thoughts thusly: “Mexico wants no roudyism [sic] or Police Gazette horrors on the frontier, which is a difficult place always to maintain order.” quoted in the *Brownsville Daily Herald*, 22 February 1896.

²³ The Díaz regime, as will be discussed in Chapter One; was characterized by the conflicting tendency to celebrate the importation of certain foreign cultural elements while simultaneously trying to control the nascent “public sphere” that was created by this piecemeal introduction of what I will argue are examples of “cultural modernity.” For a discussion of this tendency see: Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). For a study of official delegations from Mexico to various world’s fairs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries see: Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World’s Fair*. For a contemporary (1906) account of Díaz’s antagonism to Mexican traditions deemed atavistic or brutal see: Mrs. Alec-Teedie, *Porfirio Díaz, Seven Times President of Mexico* (Hurst and Blackett: London, 1906). For recent scholarly works on associations of popular pastimes, especially bullfighting, with cultural atavism see: Adrian Schubert, *Death and Money in the Afternoon: A History of the Spanish Bullfight* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) and William Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club*. Patrick Frank shows that while elites under Díaz sought to ban bullfighting, it remained a popular pastime associated by social commentators like the broadsheet writer and illustrator José Guadalupe Posada, with the historic Mexican nation. See Patrick Frank and José Guadalupe Posada, *Posada’s Broad Sheets: Mexican Popular Imagery: 1890-1910* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

them into the Mexican vernacular. This process, an uphill battle against elite ideas of civilized culture, constituted a mini-revolution in the way Mexicans and other Latin Americans began to digest new ideas of masculinity, national identity, and race in the public sphere.

Havana, Cultural Borderland

Fourteen years later and 1,700 miles away in another type of border, the port of Havana, Cubans wrestled with similar issues.²⁴ In the weeks leading up to July 4th, 1910, Havana was abuzz with anticipation. Newspaper criers touted narratives directed at the growing number of “sportmen” in the city. They sold the most minute details of the racial drama unfolding in the United States. Jack Johnson, the first African-American heavyweight boxing champion and son of former slaves, was labeled as a threat to white American masculinity and white supremacy. With obvious relish he pummeled and mocked his opponent, the original “Great White Hope,” Jim Jefferies, in the desert town of Reno, Nevada.²⁵ Before the bout, the local band played the popular song “All Coons Look Alike To Me.”²⁶ In the African-American community, the *bona fides* of Johnson as a celebrity and representative of black achievement were widely debated, with some admirers pairing the image of the boxer alongside Abraham Lincoln as the dual

²⁴ There had been a few informal boxing matches in Cuba before this date, most of them under the auspices of foreigners in Havana, like the “American Club.” This date however, marks the most salient point of confrontation between Cuban cultural commentators and legislators and transnational, modern sport.

²⁵ John Arthur “Jack” Johnson is the subject of numerous biographical works and recently (2008) a widely publicized documentary directed by Ken Burns titled *Unforgivable Blackness*. The best biography to date remains: Randy Roberts, *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of the White Hopes* (New York: Free Press, 1983). For an intriguing study that locates the myth of this boxer within the context of early twentieth century American racial and gender identity see Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Recently (2008-2010), Johnson had made national news due to efforts by a bi-partisan group of legislators to grant him posthumous pardon for his conviction of violation of the Mann Act against “white slavery.” This is testimony to the continued relevance of these racially charged events of the early twentieth century. See: *Washington Post*, 26 June 2010.

²⁶ Roberts, *Papa Jack*, p. 103.

“Heroes of the Race.”²⁷ Others saw him as a traitor, unable or unwilling to marry within his race.²⁸

In Cuba, one of the few outlets for Afro-Cuban opinion, the magazine *Minerva*, printed the narrative of Johnson’s triumph as a transnational racial representative: Afro-Cubans were keenly aware of the importance of the athlete in the framing of black identity and he served as a template for the novel idea of black celebrity.²⁹ One Afro-Cuban youth, Pedro Llanes, challenged the Chilean Juan “John” Budinich to a boxing match in the famous Payret Theatre, taking on the name “*El Jack Johnson Cubano*.” As a member of the social club “Cuba Fuerte” (Strong Cuba) composed of Afro-Cuban dock workers, Llanes tapped into the “*boxeomania*” reported among Afro-Cubans, promising to prevent foreigners from holding the title of “*champion de la patria*.”³⁰ Cubans read of the race riots immediately resulting from Johnson’s victory. In major cities across the United States, dozens of African-Americans were killed by white mobs in retribution for their celebration of Johnson’s defeat of a symbol of masculine

²⁷ This pamphlet is reproduced in Kasia Boddy, *Boxing: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion, 2009). These sentiments were mirrored by Afro-Cuban intellectuals and politicians, and probably by a wider Afro-Cuban audience. This will be discussed in Chapter Three. Johnson, as a symbol for the African-American community, divided black intellectuals. W.E.B. Dubois, for instance, celebrated Johnson and berated those who criticized his public behavior that so enraged whites. See: David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois* (New York: H. Holt, 1993). Historian Gerald Early has claimed that Johnson was better known and received more press attention in the early twentieth century than all other black leaders, entertainers, and artists, *combined*. Countee Cullen and Gerald Lyn Early, *My Soul's High Song: The Collected Writings of Countee Cullen, Voice of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

²⁸ Johnson was widely debated in the black press. Most agreed, however, that his escapades with white women were damaging to African-American assimilation. *The Crisis*, mouthpiece of the nascent NAACP, witnessed Johnson’s rise and troubles with white women by neither damning his actions nor condoning them, simply regretting that it would likely inflame “race hatred.” “Opinion,” *The Crisis*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Jan, 1913), pp. 123-24. These debates were taken up by both Booker T. Washington and W.E.B Dubois. See: Geoffrey C. Ward, *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006).

²⁹ *Minerva* (Havana), 12 July 1912. *Minerva*, first published in the 1880s, was the earliest publication dedicated to Afro-Cuban women. See: Dawn Duke, *Literary Passion, Ideological Commitment: Toward a Legacy of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian Women Writers* (Lewisburg [Pa.]: Bucknell University Press, 2008).

As is discussed in Chapter Four, the mulatto poet Nicolas Guillén remembered Johnson as an Afro-Cuban model of a black hero in the period. Johnson and his fabled match in Havana in 1915, will be the focus of Chapter Two.

³⁰ *El Triunfo*, 14,15, 16 July 1910, *La Lucha*, 15 July 1910.

white supremacy.³¹ Cubans explained these events with horror, and counted them among the many widely reported manifestations of the “stain” on American society, the *ley linch*.³²

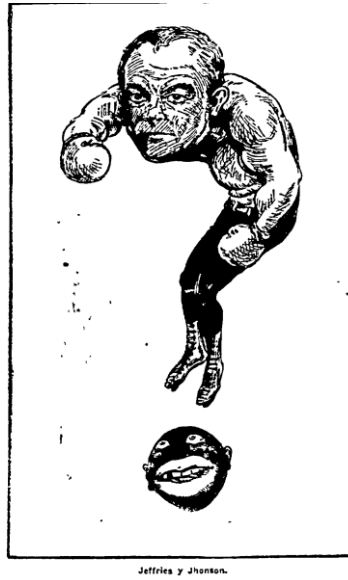


Figure 1: Jeffries and Jhonson [SIC], *El Diario*, 7 April 1910

Cuban legislators feared this racial violence would sweep across the Florida Straits; they moved quickly to censor theaters that reproduced the drama of the prizefight, but allowed newspapers to describe the racialized embarrassment of the Great White Hope. Visual reproductions of the beating, the political elite argued, were more dangerous than verbal descriptions of racial violence.

Such a universally accessible medium, film, threatened to foment violent confrontations among Cubans. They cited growing racial tensions in eastern Cuba to support a ban on cinematic exhibitions of the interracial boxing match before they reached Cuban shores. In the process, they overstepped valuable contracts held by local entrepreneurs and theater owners who had

³¹ Roberts, *Papa Jack*.

³² Lurid tales of the lynchings of African-Americans were common features in the contemporary Cuban press. As will be argued later, lynching, along with seemingly unconnected cultural products like boxing, would be argued as similarly undesirable cultural factors of the United States. An interesting study is yet to be done on the representation of practices such as lynching to Latin American readers in the midst of their own constructions of race and nation.

bought the distribution rights for films of the bout.³³ The official rhetoric of racelessness clearly did not apply here; the Cuban government followed the lead of most states in the United States, South Africa, and other nations where the film was banned.³⁴ The Havana police, citing extant statutes defining public indecency, complained of the “pornographic” boxing matches that had become the rage in theaters around the date of the Johnson-Jefferies match. In the weeks after the bout, foreign and Cuban men, even in the presence of female and child spectators, were boxing “nearly naked,” with only a small pair of boxing trunks or tight pants to cover them.³⁵ In the absence of legislation covering the novel practice, the Cuban political class, as in Mexico, relied on presidential and mayoral decrees to control the public sphere. One observer was amazed upon seeing theater crowds overflowing onto the street to catch a glimpse of Cuban boxers reproducing the bout on stage. He mused that never before in the history of the city had so many people been drawn to the theaters.³⁶ The ban on cinematic reproductions of the distant match was quickly followed by decrees against prizefighting, in any form, on the island.³⁷

Mirroring the modernizing impulses of the Porfiriato, for the Cuban political and cultural elite during the early years of the Republic there was much to be admired and emulated in

³³ These racial tensions culminated in the massacre of the *Partido Independiente de Color* (1908-1912), an Afro-Cuban political party that sought political participation to redress racial imbalances in employment and other fields. They were ruled unconstitutional because they were organized along racial lines and were therefore “racist.” Tensions grew for months, fueled by sensationalist newspaper coverage and cartoons that targeted longstanding white Cuban fears of Afro-Cuban barbarity, until the summer of 1912 when the Cuban army, augmented by private citizens, killed thousands of party members, suspected members, and innocent civilians. See: Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886 – 1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

³⁴ The Cuban idea of “racelessness” became the central racial metaphor in the period. It derived from the interracial alliance of soldiers who fought against the Spanish during the Wars for Independence. The deployment of the term and the contradictions it engendered in the Republican Period (1902-1959) has received a substantial amount of historiographical attention and will form a key part of my analysis. See, among others, Helg, *Our Rightful Share*; De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*; Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*; Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*.

³⁵ “El negocio del cine en peligro: Temese el Enardecimiento del Pueblo.” *La Lucha*, 6 July 1910, Front Page. *El Triunfo*, 8 and 9 July, 1910; *La Lucha*, 8, 12, and 13 July, 1910.

³⁶ This is examined in Chapter Two.

³⁷ It took over a year before President Gómez would allow cinematic representations of boxing to take place legally in Havana. Even then, live boxing matches were still illegal. *Archivo Nacional de Cuba* (hereafter ANC): “Decreto No. 1067,” *Gaceta Oficial*, 30 November 1911.

American and European culture; but the barbarism of the boxing ring, many hoped, would not take root on the island. The popularity of boxing had created a cross-racial, cross-class, and transnational corps of athletes who represented a novel and enticing way to gauge and express the desire for “national virility” in a comparative context. The growing Cuban middle-class prided itself on the appropriation of American-style modernity and these early prohibitions stood in stark contrast to the general trends toward cultural syncretism.³⁸ The orchestrators of the whitening project of the Cuban political elite, both liberal and conservative, rejected what were perceived as the lower elements of “Anglo-Saxon” society. Boxing was problematic largely because it was an interracial space where meritocratic achievement was central to the sport’s popularity; but the sport also tended to foment “race pride,” potentially dividing Cubans along the types of local and racial identities feared and repressed by the Cuban state.³⁹

Despite its Euro-American origins, boxing was discouraged by vocal and powerful critics in Cuba, while others argued that encouragement of modern physical culture, including boxing, should be a central goal if Cubans were to achieve masculine and modern nationhood. Recent events, like the American defeat of Spanish forces in Cuba (1898) and the Japanese victory over Russian imperial forces (1904-05), were cited as proof by proponents of the new physical cultures: nations that encouraged boxing and martial arts rose to the top of the Social

³⁸ The ready appropriation of American cultural norms, especially those emanating from popular culture, in contemporary Cuba has been extensively examined by Louis Pérez, Jr., most convincingly in Louis Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); and Louis Pérez, Jr., “Between Baseball and Bullfighting: The Quest for Nationality in Cuba, 1868-1898,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 81, No. 2 (Sept. 1994), pp. 493-517.

³⁹ Cuban readers, in almost every newspaper published on the island during the weeks surrounding July 4th, were informed of the race riots and other racial antagonism resulting from Johnson’s victory. For an account of “cultural whitening” of popular music, as a concerted project of the Cuban elite, see Robin Moore, *Music and Revolution: Cultural Change in Socialist Cuba* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). Also addressed in Lillian Guerra, “Tracing the Origins of Divergent Interpretations of Race and Nation in Cuba,” in *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

Darwinist/Spenserian evolutionary ladder.⁴⁰ On the surface, prizefighting as a democratic and rule driven field for individual achievement, blind to race, might have fit well within the Cuban state's official rhetoric of racelessness.⁴¹ In the early twentieth century, most commentators agreed that it did not. This soon would change.

This dissertation is the first transnational study to examine the gendered, racial, and nationally inflected rise of physical culture among Cuba, Mexico, and the United States in the first thirty years of the twentieth century. I argue that the creative appropriation of this cultural product is an example of "the cultural mutation which is modernity," and that this process was a central signifier of the growth of democratic civil societies in Cuba and Mexico.⁴² It engages an early form of transnational culture industry and the impact of Euro-American concepts of masculine and national identities in Latin America to build on a growing historiography of cultural hybridity in the region.⁴³ This study also examines the outwards gaze of both the Latin

⁴⁰ The impact of these two events on the changing imaginations of Latin American identities remains unstudied. The positioning of the Japanese in the early twentieth century are a telling counterpoint to generalized racial hierarchies and their military victory over a pseudo-European power, the Russians, had an important impact on racial thinking in Europe and America. As Jack London put it, writing for the popular American magazine McClure's in 1910: "the Japanese race was the freak and paradox among Eastern peoples." Immediately after the victory of the Japanese over the Russians, a vogue for Asian martial arts in Latin America brought dozens of practitioners of Jiu-Jitsu, Sumo, etc to Latin America. These men, the most famous of which was Conde Koma, circulated among presidents, generals, and elite society from Brazil to Mexico and the United States. See: Jeffrey Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Naoko Shimazu, *Japan, Race, and Equality* (London: Routledge, 1998) ; Gerald Horne, *White Supremacy and the Japanese Attack on the British Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

⁴¹ For a discussion of early Republican Era conflicts over the deployment and limits of "racelessness" see: Lillian Guerra, "From Revolution to Involution in the Early Cuban Republic: Conflicts over Race, Class, and Nation, 1902-1906," in Appelbaum, Macpherson, and Roseblatt, eds., *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share*; De la Fuente, *A Nation For All*.

⁴² François-Xavier Guerra, *Modernidad e independencias: ensayos sobre las revoluciones hispánicas* (Madrid: Encuentro, 2009), Quoted in Piccato, "Public Sphere."

⁴³ Ideas of cultural hybridity, syncretism, or negotiation have a long historiography in Latin America, the earliest and perhaps best known proponent of this lens for viewing culture being the Cuban intellectual Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, Translated by Harriet De Onis (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1947). This study builds on recent conceptual work on transnational cultures by, among others, Roger Bartra, *Blood, Ink, and Culture: Miseries and Splendors of the Post-Mexican Condition* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) ; Vivian Schelling, *Through the Kaleidoscope: The Experience of Modernity in Latin America* (London: Verso, 2001); Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, Translated by Christopher L. Chiappari (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine LeGrand, and

American elite and the popular classes during this period. While governments and intellectuals in Cuba and Mexico sought to incorporate the lessons of “new” masculine culture that had aided the Americans in their defeat of Spain and the Japanese in their victory over Russia; the popularity of boxing and martial arts grew tremendously among the masses in the early years of the twentieth century. For example, while boxing and martial arts were imported into Mexican popular culture throughout this period, Salvador Esperón, a Nahuatl speaking early boxer from Oaxaca, instructed cadets in the most prestigious military academies in Mexico City on the finer points of boxing as a key to masculinity and discipline.⁴⁴ While Cubans in the 1920s published treatises on boxing and Cuban history, Kid Chocolate, the local *negrito* “conquered” white women.⁴⁵ Control of these new behaviors became a point of contention between *ayuntamientos* and civic-social groups.⁴⁶

This study is driven by the outcomes of cultural change driven both by conscious planning and as the product of improvisation: a dialogue between activists and entrepreneurs and the public tastes they sought to mold.⁴⁷ While militaries across Latin America employed Asian

Ricardo Donato Salvatore, *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); and Jorge Larraín, *Modernity and Identity in Latin America* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

⁴⁴ The career of Esperón will be examined in later chapters. The Archivo General de la Nación houses Esperón’s manuals and memoir on boxing and its importance to modern Mexican manhood.

⁴⁵ Like Jack Johnson before him, Eligio Sardiñas reveled in being able to seduce white women to the chagrin of white supremacists in Cuba. His scrapbook contains more than a half-dozen pictures of these women. See Elío Mendez and Víctor Joaquín Ortega, *El boxeo soy yo*.

⁴⁶ Peter Beattie, in his study of the Brazilian military in this period, has traced a similar impact of these ideas on martial culture. As he argues: “The public servant, patriot, frontiersman, explorer, sportsman, statesman, humanitarian, and warrior became an archetype of Belle Époque manhood.” These characteristics became “paragons of masculine virtue.” Beattie draws on the international fame and legacy of Theodore Roosevelt and the Brazilian adventurer General Cândido Rondon. See: Peter M. Beattie, *The Tribute of Blood: Army, Honor, Race, and Nation in Brazil, 1864 – 1945* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2001), p. 121. Beattie also identifies the rise of sporting clubs in Brazil as emblematic of the diffusion of new ideas about physical culture and masculinity. On Rondon and T. Roosevelt in Brazil (1913) see: Todd A. Diacon, *Stringing Together a Nation: Cândido Mariano Da Silva Rondon and the Construction of a Modern Brazil, 1906-1930* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). For a study focused on T. Roosevelt’s fetishization of the “masculine virtues,” see: Kathleen M. Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Strenuous Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004).

⁴⁷ The dynamics of this process in each time and place will be more extensively explained and debated in the appropriate chapters.

and American martial artists and boxers as instructors of physical culture, their citizens attended wildly popular “spectacles” of prizefighting that vied for cultural space alongside more traditional practices like bullfighting.

This dissertation builds on a number of recent studies that examine race, national identity, and gender in a transnational context in Latin America. The work of Louis Pérez, Jr., has been particularly important in informing my understanding of the complex evolution of Cuban national identity during the Republican period.⁴⁸ His study of the mutual impact of Cuban and American cultures has been essential for the conceptualization of this project. Pablo Piccato, Aline Helg, Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, Mary Kay Vaughan, Alejandro de la Fuente, Frank Guridy, Rebecca Scott, Alejandra Bronfman, Robin Moore, Bill Beezley, Matthew Guttman and others have made important contributions to the understanding the cultures of race, gender, the public sphere and nation during the period under study, and their work is examined more in-depth in the ensuing chapters.⁴⁹

The above described attempts at preventative cultural engineering in Mexico and Cuba in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries failed in the long run. By the late 1920s,

⁴⁸ Pérez’s entire body of work has helped to mold my understanding of Cuban history in, but in particular his study of the impact of North American popular culture in Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*. On sport and the forging on anti-colonial Cuban national identity see: Louis A. Pérez "Between Baseball and Bullfighting: The Quest for Nationality in Cuba, 1868-1898" *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 81, no. 2 (September, 1994), pp. 493-517.

⁴⁹ Aline Helg and Alejandro de la Fuente have carried on a lively debate about the role of race in Cuban society from the late colonial period through the end of the Republic. See: Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share* and Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*. Frank Guridy’s work has contributed to our understanding of the transnational cultural flows between African-Americans and Afro-Cubans: Frank Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African-Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Rebecca Scott’s comparative work on the legacy of race after slavery in the U.S. and Cuba has been fundamental: Rebecca Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba After Slavery* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005). Matthew C. Guttman, ed., *Changing Men and Masculinities in Latin America*, has opened critical new perspectives on masculinity as a marginalized social construct throughout Latin American historiography (it has too often been “essentialized”), this study seeks to answer his call for more histories that engage the masculine side of gender. My understanding of nationalism and national identity as a constructed, “imagined” concept draws fundamental ideas from Benedict Anderson’s classic work: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1993 [1984]). Pablo Piccato’s groundbreaking essay “Public Sphere in Latin America: a map of historiography,” has yielded important insights into the use of the “public sphere” as a relatively autonomous grouping of civil society worthy of study in the formation of identities.

Mexicans and Cubans voted in informal plebiscites to overrule elite fears of cultural decadence, racial antagonism, and foreign contamination: they attended interracial prizefights in the tens of thousands, listened to radio broadcasts of bouts as far away as New York, constructed gyms dedicated to boxing and “physical culture,” and attended cinemas where athletes as masculine role models were portrayed as national *and* racial heroes by national film industries.⁵⁰ Mexicans and Cubans constructed massive public venues for boxing and wrestling, changing the urban landscape and reshaping the parameters of mass culture.⁵¹ Arenas offered popular prices where “*la clase pobre en donde el sport del boxeo cuenta con millares de entusiastas admiradores*” (the poor class amid which boxing counts thousands of enthusiastic admirers) mingled with the self-styled cosmopolitan elite.⁵²

Realist and documentary photographers across Latin America, such as Gustavo Casasola (Mexico), Enrique Díaz (Mexico), Manuel Álvarez Bravo (Mexico), Martín Chambi (Peru), Walker Evans (Cuba) and Aladar Hajdu (Hungarian/Cuban) captured the gritty and sometimes erotic visual cultures associated with pugilism that became an integral part of the experience of

⁵⁰There are no reliable statistics on how common an occurrence boxing became by the 1920s in Cuba and Mexico. Amateur historians like Enrique Encinosa, however, have catalogued over three thousand bouts taking place in Cuba during this period. Given the population and geographical diversity of Mexico and impressionistic evidence taken from newspapers where boxing was daily news, it is likely that Mexico had at least as many if not more bouts in this period. The late 1910s and early 1920s saw an exponential rise both in attendance of bouts, and a diversification, in terms of class, of the audience at those bouts.

⁵¹For studies on the process of urbanization in Mexico City under the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz see: Pablo Piccato, *City of Suspect: Crime in Mexico City, 1900-1931* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001); Katherine Elaine Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2001); Michael Johns, *The City of Mexico in the Age of Díaz*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), and William Schell Jr., *Integral Outsiders: The American Colony in Mexico City, 1876-1911*. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001). There are fewer secondary sources for Havana, Cuba. Much of this study is informed by the important work of Louis A. Pérez on urban Cuba and the rapid changes associated with urbanization and modernization in this period: Louis A. Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban* and the theoretical arguments presented in Gilbert Joseph, Catherine Legrand, and Richard Salvatore, eds., *Close Encounters of Empire*. Also see, Marial Iglesias Utset, *Las metáforas del cambio en la vida cotidiana: Cuba, 1898-1902* (Ciudad de La Habana: Ediciones Unión, 2003).

⁵²Later chapters will recount several examples of this cross-class dynamic. One early instance where this cross class appeal is explicitly addressed is in *El Mundo*, 23 March 1915, p. 10. All translations are the author’s unless otherwise noted.

urban life.⁵³ Cubans and Mexicans from across the class spectrum aligned themselves with “heroes” in matches thousands of miles away that, it might seem, had little effect on their lives; but some wrote poetry, pawned household goods to gamble on outcomes, and expressed fealty to “Latin” or *negrito* boxers who they saw as “racial brothers.” Athletes from the lower classes appropriated as *nomes de guerre* the stage names of transnational celebrity/athletes and the owners of *pulquerias* rechristened their businesses after “Latin” heroes of the prize ring. Mexican film directors made biopics of *chilango* (Mexico City) boxers who bootstrapped their way to wealth, celebrity, and masculine idolization: these stories paralleled the growth of cities, urban slums, and mass culture, and played alongside imported films that dramatized the biographies of American and European sporting idols.⁵⁴

Operating within these imaginings of race and class were malleable and contingent ideas that fed upon highly theatrical oppositions: an Argentine from the *pampas*, in the case of boxer Luis Ángel Firpo, was widely appropriated by Cubans and Mexicans for his 1923 bout against the American Jack Dempsey in New York.⁵⁵ Cubans and Mexicans celebrated their racial tolerance by comparing the lack of prohibitions of interracial matches in their national territories with stringent legal actions against similar bouts in the American South. Mexican and Cuban boxers, as the mass media dramatized them, confronted and defeated racial slurs in the democratic space of the prize ring. These identities were expressed and formed simultaneously

⁵³ See Image 1.

⁵⁴ As film historian Carl Mora has argued, by the 1940s films that presented lower class boxers as Mexican heroes were among the first to use and popularize “authentic street dialogue from the slums of Mexico City.” [In particular Alejandro Galindo’s film, *Campeón Sin Corona* (1945) (Champion Without a Crown), in which Galindo weaves an urban drama through boxing] See: Carl J Mora, *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society, 1896-2004* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co, 2005), p. 80. Interestingly, this film is used today as a reflection of Mexican culture and “Golden Age” Mexican cinema by the Mexican government in celebrating the bicentennial abroad. See: <http://mexico2010encalifornia.org/boletinero2010z.htm> (accessed 19 September 2010)

⁵⁵ The 1923 bout in which the Argentine Luis Ángel Firpo, “The Wild Bull of the Pampas,” fought the American “Half Breed” Jack Dempsey captured the imagination of thousands of Mexicans and Cubans. This will be examined in depth in chapters three and four. Firpo, who in reality was an attendant in a drug store in Buenos Aires before taking up boxing, was portrayed to a transnational audience as the quintessential Argentine cowboy of the pampas.

on local, national, racial, and transnational stages: to be a *firpista* (a supporter of Firpo) and a “sportman” was more than admiring the skill of a particular athlete; it was to express cultural, racial, and regional solidarities. The new technologies of film and radio made nearly real-time coverage of distant events possible, feeding the growth of transnational identities and cultural preferences beyond the once necessarily local. New possibilities for imaging the self and the nation entered into even the smallest towns via the images, sounds, and ideas associated with modern celebrity and masculinity in the prize ring.⁵⁶

Being a “sportman” in the early twentieth century entailed the mastery of elaborate new forms of knowledge and the expenditure, in many cases, of enormous amounts of emotional energy.⁵⁷ The meanings of the term changed from the late nineteenth century when it was deployed in the context of aristocratic pursuits like hunting and horseracing, to a more popular association with sports like boxing and baseball.⁵⁸ By the 1920s the Cuban and Mexican governments responded to the popular fascination of sportsmen with boxing and physical culture by establishing regulatory agencies--commissions on boxing--to set rules and eligibility and to collect taxes on ticket sales: their reactions to the relatively autonomous public sphere codified an already enormously popular practice. Where once they had sought to repress, now they sought to exercise legal control. Government functionaries showed their dominance in often absurd ways, refashioning established boxing rules in an effort to impose their stamp and

⁵⁶ As will be examined in Chapters Three and Four, in Cuba, for example, even individuals in town with a population in the hundreds kept abreast of daily reports on prizefighting and wrote in to national newspapers to express their opinions and to make it known that they, too, had mastered the modern languages of sport.

⁵⁷ The social designation as a “sportman” I will show, was a highly sought after characterization. Beattie, for Brazil, touches on this in *Tribute of Blood*.

⁵⁸ The use of this term took several forms but it was generally transliterated from English as “sportsman,” or “sportman.” The first printings of the term in Spanish come from the early nineteenth century, when it was almost always used to describe the practices of English aristocracy and it became increasingly common and diversified toward the end of the nineteenth century. In 1881, the word “Sportsmen” was defined for a Spanish speaking audience as a person who “unifies within himself the universality of the preferences that constitute *sport*.” By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the English term *sport* was substituted directly into Spanish. See: Federico Huesca, *Diccionario hípico y del sport, compuesto por D. Federico Huesca* (Madrid: Imprenta. de J. M. Pérez, 1881), p. 609.

sending out observers to report back to the government any “scandals” provoked by the masses that attended prizefights.⁵⁹ By the early 1920s, such highly respected and paternalistic institutions as the Hispanic Society of America lauded the “advances” within Latin American nations evident, observers argued, in their rapid mastery of sport and physical culture.⁶⁰ Such blanket statements revealed an increasingly common vantage point through which to judge cultural achievements of the nation compared with the more “civilized” and masculine Euro-American and even Japanese cultures. This idea of civilization focused on a confrontation of the decadent forces of modern urban life through vigorous masculinity and “racial improvement.”⁶¹ A “studied barbarity,” reformers argued, was the key to the health of the nation.⁶²

In a wider theoretical framework, Eric Hobsbawm has argued that the transnational spread of sport in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a key example of cultural borrowing from the “civilized” British [and Americans].⁶³ The importation of modern sport in Cuba and Mexico, however, at first seemed to confound Porfirian and Republican goals of progress: it was simultaneously atavistic and modern, it was a ceremonial enactment of violence, often compared to much maligned tradition of bullfighting. The culture of pugilism, many among the Cuban and Mexican elite feared, would encourage public disorder beyond the disciplinary capacity of the state.⁶⁴ Not only were gambling and excessive drinking linked to the barbaric practice, its most famous practitioners were uncultured men from the lower classes,

⁵⁹ These attempts by the city bureaucracies to change basic rules will be examined in Chapter Two.

⁶⁰ J. Warshaw, *The New Latin America* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co, 1922).

⁶¹ The ideas of racial improvement, often explicit in apologies for boxing in Mexico and Cuba will be imbedded in the historiographies of each chapter. For a general account of eugenics and the attempts by Latin American elite to mold their “races” toward improvement and parity with other “more advanced” races see: Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

⁶² The idea of studied barbarity, often cited in the context of Spencerian ideas of progress was common in discourses on decadence, virility, and eugenics. See: Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*; and Jack Lynch, *The Age of Elizabeth in the Age of Johnson* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁶³ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 299-300.

⁶⁴ This power struggle between the state and civil society to mold the cultural tastes of urban Mexicans will be taken up in Chapter One.

hardly Porfirian or Republican role models of selfless masculine honor in service of the modernizing nation.⁶⁵ Yet for other observers and activists, the implantation of Euro-American cultural forms like sport went hand in hand with the construction of railroads and the extension of electricity: they were emblematic of national progress.⁶⁶

These conflicting constructions of masculine national identity, I argue, were highly visible in public documents such as newspapers and *revistas*, which increasingly promoted athletics as a key factor in modern behavior and knowledge. Within these larger generalizations, the *juventud dorada* squared off against the older generation of intellectuals, among them the writers José Sixto de Sola and Nicolás Guillén of Cuba, José Juan Tablada, Amado Nervo, Federico Gamboa and Octavio Paz of Mexico.⁶⁷ They located sport as a key backdrop to modern, urban, and cosmopolitan Latin American cities; but they disagreed over its place alongside larger cultural aspirations. Many of these writers befriended journeymen African-American athletes who made their homes in the rapidly modernizing capital cities: Havana and Mexico City.⁶⁸ A distinctive Bohemian bent saturated the language of these encounters as modernist writers enthusiastically accepted or rejected the novel import and its impact in Cuba and Mexico.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ For a well argued study on the construction of masculine honor in the elite public sphere in Porfirian Mexico see: Pablo Piccato, *The Tyranny of Opinion: Honor in the Construction of the Public Sphere* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). This dissertation presents another lens to view the construction of masculinity that differs greatly from the relatively narrow demographic focus of Piccato's claims.

⁶⁶ During this period in Latin America, sport in general was often associated with the appropriation of modern values and cultural forms. See: Allen Guttman, *Games and Empires: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1994); William H. Beezley and Linda Ann Curcio, *Latin American Popular Culture: An Introduction* (Wilmington, Del: SR Books, 2000); and Joseph L. Arbena and David G. LaFrance, *Sport in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Wilmington, Del: Scholarly Resources, 2002).

⁶⁷ The work of these writers will be examined in the following chapters.

⁶⁸ Many of these journeymen boxers and "professors of sport," such as the African-American Kid Mitchell and the Afro-Dutch islander Jim Smith, will be examined throughout the following pages.

⁶⁹ As Piccato has identified, a "Bohemian" cultural mentality saturated import segments of the intellectual class during this period in Mexico, Piccato, *The Tyranny of Opinion*, pp. 19, 132, 144.

What had changed from the turn of the century to the late 1920s that created enormous public followings for a previously exotic pursuit? Why was the once widely disdained detritus of American popular culture increasingly portrayed as representative of Mexican and Cuban national identities by the instruments of mass culture? How did Mexicans and Cubans convince their governments of the benefits of “vigorous masculinity?” How were visceral disagreements over modernity and barbarity, masculinity and effeminacy, *lo extranjero* and *lo nacional* resolved by opposing sides who each portrayed themselves as promoters of the national good? What can historians of Mexico, Cuba, and the United States learn from this controversial transnational process?

This dissertation examines these questions using a transnational approach to argue that growing cultural affinities within civil society-- simultaneously local, national, and international- - melded a foreign practice into national and racial symbols to construct *cubanidad* and *mexicanidad*: a medium to express the accomplishments of the nation as a whole. This process took place over a period of several decades and created “national passions” out of the once exotic and bizarre.⁷⁰ It entailed a dialogue between civil society in the form of social groupings like novel athletic clubs, middle-class reformers, and athletes from the marginal classes and their reactionary governments. It reveals what these people thought (or at least how they expressed those thoughts), and how they put those ideas into action. These changes were pushed forward through abortive legislation, civic social petitions, clandestine practices, pamphleteering, editorializing, and the collective imagination of a new type of national man. Its main protagonists were social activists, journalists, transnational athletes, and the public who made these entrepreneurial ventures both popular and profitable. The process culminated with the

⁷⁰ Though “passion” is a highly subjective term, I find the popular enthusiasm for boxing “heroes” in Cuba and Mexico over the twentieth century to warrant the use. In this I second Pérez, Jr. and Mexican historian Marco Antonio Maldonado. Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*; Maldonado, *Historia del box: Pasión por los guantes*.

appropriation of a novel practice which blurred the boundaries between the national and the foreign. In so doing, it created new transnational spaces for popular participation and recognition as valuable members of the nation.⁷¹

This was not an inevitable process: the cultural shifts in Mexico and Cuba that created these spaces were the product of concerted efforts to re-imagine the form and content of gender and nation. As Eric Hobsbawm has argued, sport created a new venue in which to express and imagine national characteristics that were often appropriated by civic society at dizzying speed, before the official processes of institutionalization.⁷² Hobsbawm goes so far as to pose sport as “one of the most significant new social practices of [the] period.”⁷³ The popularization and nationalization of prize-fighting and the “physical culture” it entailed grew as both a conscious project of middle-class reformers and through improvisation. At stake was far more than two men (and later women) pummeling each other in front of a paying audience. The proponents and opponents of pugilism, at least, argued such. They deployed competing narratives of history, national prestige, racial toleration and, in the end, culture, to argue what they believed to be best for the nation.⁷⁴ As advocates and opponents debated a seemingly innocuous cultural process, Cubans and Mexican called forth their most fundamental ideas and worldviews: the terms of engagement were most often national identity, modernity, and gender.

Why Cuba and Mexico; why sport, why boxing?

⁷¹ Chapters Three and Four will focus on this process.

⁷² Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 299-300.

⁷⁴ As in France, for example, Cubans and Mexicans cited their acceptance of African-American boxers as exemplar of their higher level of civilization and racial tolerance than the United States’ “negrophobia.” See the following chapters for a discussion of the use of black boxers as “ciphers” for transnational racial ideas and Theresa Runstedtler’s study on African-American boxers abroad during this period, Runstedtler, *Journeymen*.

Boxing was controversial in Latin America long before the introduction of any other modern sport.⁷⁵ In Mexico as early as 1806, social commentators presented their audience with accounts of English boxing as an essentially barbaric and bizarre spectacle relegated to the vulgar public (*populacho*) and as a peculiarity of the British “race.”⁷⁶ From the late nineteenth century onward, boxing (*el box*, *boxeo*, or *pugilato* as it was variously transliterated into Spanish) was one of the first truly global cultural/sport industries and it was a site where diverse conceptions a range of cultural ideas underwent divisive discussion and debate, revealing much about the manners in which Cubans and Mexicans gauged their capacities for assimilation and excellence amid increasingly visible cultural flows from abroad.⁷⁷ In the early years of the twentieth century, boxing’s association with “Anglo-ness” remained; but it was increasingly viewed as a site for Mexican and Cuban displays of virility.

This accommodation also caused Latin American cultural intermediaries to look inward and to reconsider their compatriots who excelled within the new “science” of physical culture.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ I borrow the definition of modern sport from: Mike Huggins, *The Victorians and Sport* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004). This account traces the conflicting ideas behind modern sport. The word “sport” itself changed from the mid to the late nineteenth century from denoting the pastoral pursuits of the wealthy such as fox hunting, fishing, and horse racing, to the new forms associated with modern sports like baseball, cricket, boxing, etc. This shift also entailed the commercialization of mass spectacle sports and the democratization of their practice.

⁷⁶ *Diario de México*, 10 March 1806; *Diario de México*; “Pugilato, Londres” 9 April 1810.

⁷⁷ This approach is used by historian Theresa E. Rundstedtler in her forthcoming monograph: *Race, Boxing, and the Transnational World of Jack Johnson*. Rundstedtler traces the emergence of boxing in the early twentieth century as a global phenomenon whose examination yields crucial insights into race, nation, and gender in a range of locales. This study builds on many of her ideas while extending analysis to Latin America and deepening our understanding of this process from both a transnational and national focus. The best scholarly treatment of the cultures associated with modern pugilism is still Elliot Gorn: *The Manly Art: Bare-knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989). Other helpful works include Steven A. Reiss, *Sport in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Wheeling: Harland Davidson, 1995). For a study of boxing and its wider implications for race and masculinity see: Gerald Early, *The Culture of Bruising: Essays on Prizefighting, Literature and Modern American Culture* (New York: Ecco Press, 1992). The literature on boxing and culture in Latin America is much more limited. For popular sources see for Cuba: Enrique Encinoso, *Azúcar y chocolate: historia del boxeo cubano* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 2004); Elio Mendez and Victor Menéndez, *Kid Chocolate: El boxeo soy yo* (Habana: Editorial Orbe, 1981); and Mexico: Marco A. Maldonado and Ruben A. Zámora, *Historia del box mexicano* (México: Editorial Clio, 2000).

⁷⁸ I use the idea of “cultural intermediaries” to describe those members of the press, entrepreneurs, and some intellectuals who sought to translate modern sport into the Mexican and Cuban vernaculars. As will be illustrated in later chapters, this class negotiated the meaning and imported foreign cultures in terms of their suitability and

Champion boxers, almost entirely drawn from the most marginal social groups in the U.S. and increasingly in Latin America—poor blacks, *mestizos*, mulattoes and even Sino-Cubans—were awarded official recognition by their governments and popular acclaim by the news media, radio, and cinema as exemplars of national virility and modernity: being compared, in one case, to the Afro-Cuban hero and symbol of the Cuban Wars for Independence, Antonio Maceo.⁷⁹

By the end of this initial period of frenetic expansion, specialized magazines in both Cuba and Mexico fed the popular appetite for illustrations, pictures, and narratives about how local boys (*los del patio*) became “important” through boxing and in the process represented Mexican and Cuban virility abroad.⁸⁰ Athletic celebrities like the Mexicans Luis “Kid Azteca” Villanueva and Rodolfo Casanova and Cubans “Kid Chocolate” and “Black Bill” were among the first popular heroes who gained their enormous social prestige not from battlefield glory but from their achievements in a transnational competitive medium of popular culture. Their fame was often contingent on success abroad, dissolving metaphorical and geographical borders of the nation: the very use of the moniker “Kid” implied the hybrid nature of their personas. They represented, to paraphrase Mary Kay Vaughan, a nascent civic and cultural space between the “Eagle and the Virgin,” a new arena in which to be *muy mexicano* or *muy cubano*.⁸¹ These qualitative changes in the public sphere represent a way to understand culture beyond the binary

desirability for the public as a whole. Once this process had begun, and boxing became a viable pastime, mass culture began to reshape the meaning of this novelty. As Featherstone describes them, cultural intermediaries “cater for an expand the range of styles and lifestyles available to audiences and consumers.” See: Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2007); David Ashley, *History Without a Subject: The Postmodern Condition* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997). This idea has been convincingly applied to the rise of celebrities in modern sport in Barry Smart, *The Sport Star: Modern Sport and the Cultural Economy of Sporting Celebrity* (London: Sage, 2005); and Richard Giulianotti, *Sport: A Critical Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

⁷⁹ This will be examined in Chapter Four.

⁸⁰ These *revistas*, like the Cuban weekly *Nocaut*, and the Mexican *Afición*, will be examined in Chapters Three and Four.

⁸¹ “The Eagle and the Virgin” are symbols used for the Mexican state and the Catholic Church as two powerful and influential institutions. This study examines culture between these two poles. See Mary Kay Vaughan, *The Eagle and the Virgin*.

relationships between power and institutions and the functioning of capitalist markets.⁸² Sport in this period became one of the few venues where lower class Cubans and Mexicans could excel and enjoy the, albeit qualified, respect of their compatriots from across the class spectrum. While most public representations of Afro-Cubans, for example, reproduced engrained stereotypes of atavistic and servile pseudo-citizens, the depiction of black boxers as accomplished, “disciplined,” “intelligent,” and “scientific” exemplars of Cuban racial democracy provided a counter point to these degrading images.⁸³

In the space of two decades, the appropriation of modern, transnational ideas about the body and “physical culture,” best exemplified in dramatic narratives and celebration of the boxer as a modern masculine ideal, had moved from middle-class novelty to national passion in Cuba and Mexico.⁸⁴ Illustrative of this process are narratives from a number of writers, in their role as social commentators and cultural intermediaries that looked to the behaviors and even the bodies of their compatriots to gauge the place of their nation compared to other “civilized” peoples. Lower class *mestizos*, *mulattoes*, and *negros* were paraded down central avenues, their names appearing in lights and their faces and bodies featured as centerpieces in the popular press and advertisements. These representations were entirely novel, and entirely modern.

The examination of the rise of modern sport in the early twentieth century to elucidate broader ideas of gender, nationalism, race, and the body (and the intersection of these ideas) has

⁸² Pablo Piccato, "Public sphere in Latin America: A Map of the Historiography," *Social History*. 35, no. 2 [2010] 165-192.

⁸³ A systematic study of the portrayal of Afro-Cubans in popular culture, the public sphere, and the press has yet to be undertaken, but there are numerous histories that draw on public and popular representations and constructions of the image of black Cubans. Aline Helg has argued that the sensationalized journalistic/cartoon representations of the Afro-Cubans as atavistic, hyper-sexualized, and bloodthirsty helped foment the white violence that culminated with the massacre of the Independent Party of Color in 1912, Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, For a study on representations of Afro-Cubans in late colonial popular theater see: Jill Lane, *Blackface Cuba: 1840 – 1895* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005) and Susan Thomas, *Cuban Zarzuela: Performing Race and Gender on Havana's Lyric Stage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

⁸⁴ Chapter Four examines the crystallization of narratives about Mexican boxing in a several popular films.

recently generated a broad scholarly literature.⁸⁵ As historian Joseph Arbena has argued “the academic study of sport no longer requires extended justifications or apologies.”⁸⁶ The importation of modern sport in Latin America serves as a crucial vantage point for cultural and social historians of the region.⁸⁷ This dissertation builds on and extends these ideas to examine the impact of transnational physical culture, ideas about the body and sport, on constructions of race, nation, and gender in modern Latin America during the initial phases of the introduction and popularization of this novel culture.

The diffusion of boxing, however, warrants special attention. *El pugilato*, especially in its formative years, was a polarizing, often disreputable, and loaded cultural practice. It generated enormous amounts of media coverage and other documentation, often about individuals from social classes who rarely surface in the historical record. Boxing was and remains a source of literary and artistic inspiration, a rallying point for popular and ethnic nationalism, a political tool, and a perceived means of upward social mobility.⁸⁸ By the 1920s, competitive sport and physical culture were focal points for divergent contentions about the

⁸⁵ See, for example: John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and The Perfect Man : The White Male body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002); John M. Hoberman, *Darwin's Athletes: How Sport Has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997); Gerald R. Gems, *The Athletic Crusade: Sport and American Cultural Imperialism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Amy Bass, *In the Game: Race, Identity, and Sports in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁸⁶ Joseph Arbena, *Sport and Society in Latin America*, p.1.

⁸⁷ For the best overviews and edited volumes see: Joseph L. Arbena and David G. LaFrance, *Sport in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Wilmington, Del: Scholarly Resources, 2002); J.A. Managan and Lamartine P. Dacosta, *Sport in Latin American Society Past and Present* (Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002); Joseph Arbena, ed., *Sport and Society in Latin America*; Michael E. Lomax, *Sports and the Racial Divide: African-American and Latino Experience in an Era of Change* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008).

⁸⁸ For broad overviews of the boxing in literature and art see Kasia Boddy, *Boxing: A Cultural History*; and H.T. David Scott, *The Art and Aesthetics of Boxing* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008). In both Cuba and Mexico today (2010) boxers remain highly visible cultural symbols. For example, though few individuals not directly associated with the Cuban state are allowed a presence in state media, the Olympic champion boxer Félix Savón appears on television commercials, in his boxing attire, to advertise the Havana television station. In Mexico, virtually any newsstand carries specialized magazines and comic books dedicated to boxing and *lucha libre* (highly theatrical Mexican professional wrestling).

select aspects of modernity that Cubans and Mexicans should embrace, tolerate, or reject.⁸⁹ The contemporary significance of boxing within a highly competitive, transnational market for cultural ideas, and the processes of domestication that the sport underwent reveal expanding meanings of *lo cubano* and *lo mexicano* in the public sphere at the core of this study.

During this period, Latin Americans increasingly came into contact with novel foreign ideas and cultural trends via the rapid diffusion of international and domestic media. First, substantially increased newspaper coverage flooded the national territories with daily print runs in the hundreds of thousands and by the mid-1920s commercial radio sought to entertain and inform along the American model.⁹⁰ This study examines both the domestic and transnational contexts of these encounters: as mass media brought accounts of *el extranjero* into cafes, homes, factories and other spaces, the popularity of sport grew within urban areas, particularly Mexico City and Havana.⁹¹

International celebrities like Jack Johnson, Jack Dempsey, George Carpentier, and Luis Ángel Firpo (all of whom staged tours in both Cuba and Mexico) enjoyed massive followings in

⁸⁹As will be illustrated extensively in later chapters, by the 1930s, Cuban and Mexican athletes were important symbols for the respective nations' attainment of the forms and practices of "modern" countries. Success was often cited as indicative that Cuba and Mexico were modernizing and westernizing, that they could meet and defeat Americans and Europeans in a neutral and meritocratic contest. The values of competition, hard work, and individualism were bolstered by success in international bouts. At times, these pursuits were actively opposed by the state, leaving civil society to fend for itself--collecting money, for example to fund "Mexico's" participation in the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics when the state refused to fund Mexican athletes (this Olympics resulted in Mexico's first medal, a silver in boxing for Francisco Cabañas). A recent (2009) example of the importance of an athlete (boxer) to national identity and masculinity is Manny Pacquiao. He is arguably the most famous individual in the Philippines, so much so that he is touted as a possible successor to the current president. He was cited by *Time Magazine* as one of the Most Influential People in the World for 2009. Pacquiao's boxing matches are so widely viewed in the Philippines, that there is a drop in the crime rate while each bout airs (cited in *Time Magazine Online*, http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1883644_1883653_1884544,00.html, accessed on 22 September 2009).

⁹⁰Jairo Lugo-Ocando, *The Media in Latin America* (Berkshire, England: McGraw Hill/Open University Press, 2008). As will be examined in Chapter Three and Four, boxing matches from abroad were among the first widely broadcast radio events in both Mexico and Cuba.

⁹¹"Modern sport," as a discrete concept draws most of its sociological explication via Max Weber. Allen Guttman defined seven characteristics that mark the advent of modern sport as a variant of physical culture: they are *secularization, meritocracy, specialization, rationalization, bureaucratization, quantification* and *the pursuit of records*. These factors cited in: Richard Giulianotti, *Sport: A Critical Sociology* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 2004), pp. 20-21.

Latin America.⁹² The media presented them as superior embodiments of their respective nationalities, representing stereotyped images of the “bad nigger,” “the self-made American,” “the elegant Frenchman,” and the “Argentine cowboy.” Their success and notoriety inspired local fighters like Luis “Kid Azteca” Villanueva and Rodolfo Casanova in Mexico and Eligio “Kid Chocolate” Sardiñas of Cuba who created transnational followings of their own right. Chocolate and Azteca were among the first of many Latin Americans to appropriate and excel in the “Anglo” sport after the First World War.

By the mid-1920s, Havana and Mexico City were home to hundreds of civil-social clubs and organizations that were explicitly dedicated to the practice of physical culture. The scale of membership and the spread of these types of voluntary social organizations suggest a shift in ideas about the body, modernity, and the organization of citizens along the lines of common cultural affinities within the larger national collective. These were not solely aristocratic groups like the famous Jockey Club in Mexico City or the Unión Club and Vedado Tennis Club in Havana.⁹³ These organizations represented a cross section of social classes from dock workers in the Cuban port, to railroad laborers and miners in the mountainous interior of Mexico. These clubs were an important locus of cross-cultural and interracial contact, as U.S., British, Australian, Japanese, Ottoman, German, Russian and other foreign nationals learned and worked alongside Mexicans and Cubans. Understanding this level of cross-cultural contact, often

⁹² In a critical vein, Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén remembered the omnipresence of American sport stars “on the front pages” of Cuban newspapers. He characterizes Jack Johnson, the first African-American heavyweight champion, as “our model of a champion.” Nicolás Guillén, *Las grandes elegías y otros poemas* (Ayacucho, Peru: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1984), p. 202.

⁹³ A short account of some of the cultural dynamics that surrounded club life in Mexico City at the aristocratic Jockey Club is contained in: William Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987). This brief study opens many questions for further research. There are few comparable studies for this important expansion of civil society organization in Cuba. For an account of a select few civil social organizations see Louis Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999) and Frank Andre Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African-Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

obscured by that of diplomacy and international business, is another contribution of this dissertation.⁹⁴

A Note on Sources

While this study culls important information from traditional archival sources including petitions, legal actions, and granted and denied permits, these shifts in cultural orientation played out largely in the most prolific public documents of the day: newspapers and *revistas*. There are few and fragmentary traces of this process extant in archives in Cuba, Mexico, and the United States. Two examples will illustrate the benefit of using these diverse documents in tandem with archival sources. While the events surrounding the foundation of a new social-athletic club might surface in a brief petition to the Mexico City or Havana *ayuntamientos* (city governments), most of the narrative and the justification for these actions must be drawn from the concerted attempts to change culture by members, journalists, and other social commentators that filled the growing coverage of sport and physical culture in periodical documents where the protagonists sought to influence public opinion and attract business. In another example, Mexican newspapers from 1906 to the mid-1920s carried dozens of articles on a mysterious Afro-descended individual named Jim “Black Diamond” Smith who taught boxing and jiu-jitsu to elite and middle-class Mexicans. He was touted as a proponent of the “manly science,” and was variously cited as being Australian, Jamaican, South American, or American. It wasn’t until his immigration records surfaced in the *Archivo General de la Nación* that I learned he was a

⁹⁴ This dissertation joins a growing number of studies of popular culture phenomenon in Latin America in the twentieth century. For a broad theoretical overview see: William Rowe and Vivian Schelling, *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America* (London: Verso, 1991) and William H. Beezley and Linda Ann Curcio, *Latin American Popular Culture: An Introduction* (Wilmington, Del: SR Books, 2000). For a study of popular/elite music and national identity see: Hermano Vianna, *Mistério do samba* (Rio de Janeiro: Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 1995). Robin D. Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997).

Dutch national, that he had entered Mexico through the United States, spoke Dutch, Spanish, and English, and had been born on the small Dutch island of San Eustatius in the Caribbean.

As the historian of Mexico, Pablo Piccato argues, this type of project must rely heavily on non-traditional sources.⁹⁵ In these documents, the centrality of race, national identity, and gender in the public debates surrounding physical culture in the public sphere are shown in dramatic relief. Whereas in the early twentieth century virtually no widely disseminated Mexican or Cuban periodical documents contained sections dedicated to physical culture, by the 1920s, like their counterparts in the United States, almost all of them did. As the point of dissemination for a novel and controversial practice, these sections emerge as far more than a simple reportage of the where, when, and whom. They are most tellingly composed of polemical debates, letters to the editor, public pleas and explicit comparisons of Cubans and Mexicans with perceived international standards embodied in athletic celebrities *du jour*. I argue that the given the incremental, spontaneous and often informal nature of these changes, traditional archival sources give a limited vantage point; hence the emphasis on images, periodical literature, polemical books, cinema, diaries, and memoirs.

In a more general sense, the use of these documents is both a recreation of public discourse and methodological leap into the use of that amorphous idea of the public sphere. As Juan Carlos Portantiero has argued, the public sphere is defined as “the locus for the autonomous organization of a self-managed or cooperative society.”⁹⁶ Central to this concept is the existence of a democratic civil society that seeks to set its own norms and contours based on a number of

⁹⁵ Pablo Piccato, “Politics and the Technology of Honor,” Other important historians of Mexico and Cuba in this period also rely heavily on periodical and published documents. They include but are not limited to Louis Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*; Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, Robert McKee Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities*; Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*; Robin D. Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness*; Alejandra Bronfman, *Measures of Equality*; Lisa Brock and Digna Castañeda Fuertes, *Between Race and Nation*; Mark Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis, *The Eagle and the Virgin*; Manuel Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World’s Fair*; William Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club*, and Jonathan Kandell, *La Capital*.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Pablo Piccato, “Public Sphere in Latin America,” p. 165.

diverse informational inputs. I argue that the processes examined in this dissertation, constitute an exploration of early manifestations of modern Cuban and Mexican civil societies.

Participation was unbalanced to be sure, but greatly increased (since the late nineteenth century) availability of transnational information created a uniquely modern ground where Mexicans and Cubans fought for their cultural autonomy: the legality of certain cultural practices. As Pablo Piccato has shown, two processes were integral to the creation of the “bourgeois public sphere.” First, print culture and literacy, dependant on consumers of information had to be relatively stable. Second, “the emergence of spaces of social life, media and themes of discussion...courts, salons, newspapers and cafes organized debates where public men and women used their taste to judge theater, literature..” etc. These two facets emerged in Cuba and Mexico during this period.⁹⁷ The novel public sphere bridged three areas of life: the private, domestic realm, the public means necessary to exchange opinions (media and civil social organizations) and the rhetoric of the state.⁹⁸

The use of documents generated by and generating the public sphere raises important questions. A majority of urban Cubans and Mexicans residing in the capital cities of Mexico City and Havana in the early twentieth century were literate. By some contemporary accounts, there were over one-hundred newspapers and other periodicals in Havana alone in 1900.⁹⁹ Literacy rates, however, varied widely across regions and between urban and rural settings. By 1910, Mexico City boasted over 50% literacy and the newspaper *El Imparcial* had a daily circulation of over 100,000 issues; its price at one centavo put it easily within reach of working-

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 167-68.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ See: Albert James Norton, *Norton's Complete Handbook of Havana and Cuba* (Chicago and New York: Rand, McNally & Co., 1900), pp. 142-144.

class readers.¹⁰⁰ The difficulty in establishing literacy rates can be glimpsed in the fact that between 1915 and 1934 (despite massive literacy campaigns by the Mexican government), the percent of literate citizens in Mexico City remained relatively static.¹⁰¹ This was due to the massive population growth mostly emanating from peripheral rural areas where literacy was low. By 1940, the country as a whole was still only 43.2% literate and it wasn't until 1950 that literacy climbed over 50%.¹⁰² Cuba during the same period had much higher literacy rates for both men and women, with women enjoying higher literacy than men by the last pre-Revolutionary census in 1953: 74.1% and 78.8% respectively.¹⁰³ The period following the Cuban Wars for Independence (1895-98), especially the 1920s, saw a dramatic rise in literacy rates across the island.¹⁰⁴ By 1919, 61.6% of the population as a whole was literate with that figure rising to over 71% by the end of the period under consideration, 1931.¹⁰⁵

As with most any cultural phenomenon, the voices that speak loudest in the historical record are those that were best situated to express themselves. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, urban intellectuals (*letrados*) were forced to incorporate popular cultures into their writings and to countenance “powerful democratizing cross-currents.”¹⁰⁶ Most of the early protagonists in this process were those who wrote and disseminated their thoughts in the mass

¹⁰⁰ Figures cited in William H. Beezley and Michael C. Meyer. *The Oxford History of Mexico* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 409; and John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens: The Revolution in Mexico City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), pp. 52-54.

¹⁰¹ Patrice Elizabeth Olsen, *Artifacts of Revolution: Architecture, Society, and Politics in Mexico City, 1920-1940*. Latin American Silhouettes (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

¹⁰² *Consejo Nacional de Población, México Demográfico* (México D.F., 1978), p. 78.; Ricardo Urioste, *Anuario Mexicano, 1982* (México D.F., 1982), pp. 72-73; cited in David E. Hayes-Bautista, Werner O. Schink, and Jorge Chapa, *The Burden of Support: Young Latinos in an Aging Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

¹⁰³ Figures cited in Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *Cuban Women and the Struggle for 'Conciencia'* in *Cuban Studies*, 17, (1987), p. 53.

¹⁰⁴ See: Jorge Domínguez, *Cuba: Order and Revolution* (Cambridge Belknap Press, 1978), pp. 71-72.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ By the twentieth century “the lettered city had itself been transformed . . . from a handful of elite *letrados* designing government policies in their own image, into a socially more heterogeneous group that retained a vision of itself as a cultural aristocracy but incorporated powerful democratizing cross-currents.” Ángel Rama, *The Lettered City* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 112.

media. While this may yield an impressionist view of social change as a whole, it is as close as the historian can get to recreate the conditions under which these debates and actions unfolded. Public opinion polls were nonexistent in this period. In their absence, I draw conclusions based on attendance numbers (most bouts were advertised with “popular prices”) and representations in the burgeoning cultural industries that imagined Mexicans and Cubans as virile, modern, and cosmopolitan “sportmen,” and the many instances when individuals wrote about how these novel ideas affected their lives and worldviews. In most instances, I try to allow the sources to speak for themselves, as diverse writers reflected on the rapid changes taking place around them.

How the *Historia* Unfolds

Chapter One, “*El Deporte Viril* and the Porfirian Man” argues that Mexican writers and social critics sought to portray the nation as virile and progressive via their either their rejection or appropriation of Euro-American physical culture, explicitly comparing themselves to other “civilized” nations before, during, and after the Mexican Revolution. This tumultuous era saw boxing outlawed and legalized several times as local power changed hands and national policy vacillated between xenophobia and xenophilia. It explores the petitions of intellectuals, social clubs, and entrepreneurs who sought to influence policy on public entertainment, often arguing their position in the language of positive eugenics and national regeneration. This section uncovers the transnational journeys of racially marginalized prizefighters such as Jim Smith and Kid Mitchell (Afro-Dutch and African-Mexican-American, respectively) as they sought to profit by and implant boxing in Mexico.

The second chapter, “Who will Say we are not Progressing?:” Cuba, the ‘White Hope,’” and the Challenge of Novelty, 1910-1915,” takes the reader to the streets, clubs, and theaters of

Havana between 1910 and 1915. Amid furious public debate in April of 1915, Jack Johnson lost his heavyweight title to the latest Great White Hope in a suburb of the capital. This chapter examines legal and cultural debates that coalesced around the earliest professional bouts in Cuba (1910), with the bulk of attention focused on the 1915 media and cultural event. I argue that Cubans were divided over the role that modern sport, with its racial, gendered, and national inflections, should play within their rapidly changing society. Boxing's transnational reach and the high degree of mobility enjoyed by its practitioners presented Cubans with a problematic decision: how would Cubans define themselves amid growing American influence?

Chapter Three, "He Carries the Hope of the Race in his Hands," shifts to the "Golden Age" of boxing in Mexico, the 1920s. I illustrate the transnational importance of sport by examining several interrelated case studies. I argue that the 1923 boxing match between the Argentine Luis Ángel Firpo and American Jack Dempsey reveals popular conceptions of race and nation in Mexico: the lived reality of race beneath the abstractions of theory. The celebration of Firpo reveals some of the diverse constructions of race and regional identity in operation in contemporary Latin America. The chapter continues to the 1930s and examines the enormously popular lower-class heroes, "martyrs" and archetypes of national virility.

The last full chapter moves back to Cuba as I examine the racial, gendered, and nationalist language deployed to celebrate the rise of Cuban boxers to international prominence in the 1920s and 30s. Central to this process was the creation of lower-class "heroes" who represented the nation abroad and were nearly deified at home, even amid the constriction of the social spaces available for Afro-Cubans in the public sphere. I trace how the exotic was nationalized and became a part of everyday life and Cuban expressions of *lo cubano*.

In the final section, I survey the legacy of boxing in its racial, national and gendered contexts after the main chronological focus of this study and examine some of the images produced during the early years sport in Cuba and Mexico that have been preserved in various archives in both countries. I also argue for some more general conclusions and directions for future research relevant to this topic and approach.

This study began by seeking to explain individuals and processes that did not fit well into the extant historiography and moved to situate them in their historical context: the sons of slaves who became world traveling athletes and masculine role models, Japanese “professors” of physical culture and jiu-jitsu who circulated at the highest level of government in many Latin American countries, Cubans from the slums of Havana who were constructed as controversial national symbols and traded boxing lessons for French classes in *fin de siècle* Paris, Mexicans from Tepito who defended “national honor” in arenas in the United States--all of this forming a part of an early straining of what is now referred to as “globalization.” By fleshing out some of the concrete manifestations situated at the margins of such abstract ideas as race, nation, and gender, I hope to contribute to the understanding of the cultural perceptions and social realities during this rapidly changing period. Beneath the upheavals of Revolution and foreign interventions, many of the basic factors of how Mexicans and Cubans envisioned and expressed their national identities in the modern world took shape. These changes embedded themselves on the level of culture, outlasting political systems and continuing to this day.

CHAPTER II

“EL DEPORTE VIRIL AND THE PORFIRIAN MAN: MODERNITY, IDENTITY, MASCULINITY AND PUGILISM IN MEXICO

Jim “Diamante Negro” Smith, the polyglot Afro-Dutch boxer from the Caribbean island of San Eustatius, made for an unusual sight as he jogged through the Mexico City *zócalo* (main square) alongside his French trainer, the fencer and wrestler Eugene Spinner, in the winter of 1907.¹⁰⁷ Smith was born in 1880 and was likely descended from the slaves and free blacks who toiled in the small and cosmopolitan Dutch trading post.¹⁰⁸ He learned what was then referred to as the “science” of boxing while living near the Mexican-American border in the early twentieth century. In that zone of cultural confluence and conflict, he was exposed to the illegal underworld of prizefighting that generated transnational press coverage and public uproar greater

¹⁰⁷ *The Mexican Herald* (Hereafter *MH*) August 26, 1907; August 27, 1907; November 29, 1907. Though Afro-Mexicans (free and enslaved) formed a large and highly visible portion of colonial Mexico City, they had largely disappeared from the historical record by the early twentieth century until anthropological studies that focused on the Afro-Mexican population of coastal areas in the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz. See: G. Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negra de México* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1972). There are still few studies on urban Afro-Mexicans during the Porfirian and Revolutionary Eras. For this study, Mexican discourse on people of African descent will mainly focus on perceptions of African-Americans and reactions to imported racial ideologies. There are numerous studies on Afro-Mexicans in the colonial era, see, for example: Herman Lee Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570 – 1640* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2005); Patrick James Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz: Race, Ethnicity, and Regional Development* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001); Joan Cameron Bristol, *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches: Afro-Mexican Ritual Practice in the Seventeenth Century* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007) and R. Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City ; 1660 – 1720* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

¹⁰⁸ *Archivo General de la Nación* (hereafter: AGN), Registro de Extranjeros, No. 9518. San Eustatius was an integral part of the Dutch colonial empire in the Caribbean as a “free port.” It differed from most Caribbean slave societies in that most of the slaves and free people of color were employed in commercial functions and had an “unparalleled” freedom of movement which contributed to the high incidence of manumission. As Richard Grant Gilmore put it, “The degree to which slaves participated in the international commercial trade on the island was unparalleled.” Due to the nature of the society and the economy of the island, people of African descent were unusually mobile, this tradition of mobility perhaps contributed to the ease with which Jim Smith traveled within several countries. Jay B. Haviser and Kevin C. MacDonald, *African Re-Genesis: Confronting Social Issues in the Diaspora* (Abingdon, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2006), p. 86; Barbara L. Solow, *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2002).

than any other public spectacle of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.¹⁰⁹ In April of 1907, he crossed the border from El Paso, Texas, to Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, likely on the invitation of the wealthy American mining engineer, inventor, and “sportman,” Andrew Ennis.¹¹⁰ Like many foreigners, Ennis thrived in Mexico thanks to preferential licensing by the Porfirian government, which facilitated massive foreign investment and westernization as a means to obtain national “progress.”¹¹¹ Ennis exploited the rich iron and silver deposits in the mining city of Guanajuato and staged boxing matches there, becoming Smith’s early benefactor and promoter.¹¹² Ennis, as a mechanical engineer and promoter of modern sport is emblematic of the multifaceted technological, financial, and cultural impact of Americans resident in Mexico in the late Porfiriato.¹¹³ The Porfirian elite generally applauded the tangible benefits and concrete indicators of modernization that followed foreign capital and entrepreneurship. Modern scholars of globalization have argued that the late nineteenth and early twentieth century marked the intensification of international trade that increasingly connected the economies, and, I argue, the

¹⁰⁹ See the opening account of the “fistic carnival” in the Introduction to this dissertation. Boxing was the subject of frenetic legislative attempts, police action, civic social crusades, and other movements against the sport as low class and brutalizing. Its expansion into Latin America created cultural rifts that are the subject of this chapter.

¹¹⁰ This period saw the rise of border cities like Ciudad Juárez and Tijuana as permissive zones where border-crossing Americans could enjoy disreputable and often illegal pursuits like boxing and horseracing, even before the advent of prohibition increased the appeal of these neighboring vice havens. Ciudad Juárez became known by a series of sordid nicknames such as “New Sodom,” “Black City of Mexico,” and “Swamp of Immorality.” Friedrich Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 268; Oscar J. Martínez, *Border Boom Town: Ciudad Juárez Since 1848* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), pp. 30, 103;

¹¹¹ Juan Carlos Moreno-Brid and Jaime Ros, *Development and Growth in the Mexican Economy: A Historical Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹¹² Ennis would later sue the Mexican government for land nationalized in 1915 during the Mexican Revolution. The date of Smith’s first entry into Mexico is uncertain, it is possible that he was a member of a “hose team,” in Bisbee, Arizona that went periodically into the mining area around Cananea to compete against other fire hose teams in the early years of the twentieth century. *Bisbee Daily Review*, 5 May 1903. On Ennis as an inventor and miner see: *The Mexican Mining Journal* (Mexico City: Mexican Pub. Company), Vol. 6 [Aug, 1908], p. 28; and “Claimant Adrew Ennis,” United States, *Arbitration Series* [State Department](Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1940), pp. 132-33.

¹¹³ *Division of Passport Control: Passport Applications for Declarants, 1907–1911 and 1914–1920*. NARA Microfilm Publication ARC 1244178: A1 538. General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59. National Archives, Washington D.C. Businessmen like Andrew Ennis surface often in a variety of records. More marginal individuals like Jim Smith, however, are more difficult to trace. It is likely that Smith went by aliases at different times in his life.

cultures of Latin America and the United States.¹¹⁴ It is on the unstable border between elite and popular culture, however, that the importation of American tastes and behaviors clearly visible in the growing popularity of modern sport produced a profound ambivalence about these more ambiguous symbols of modernity.¹¹⁵

During the four decades of Jim Smith's life in Mexico, the boxer was a well-known and highly visible personality in Mexico City and was perhaps the most documented representative of an interracial and transnational network of early "journeymen" whose professional and cultural pursuits would contribute to the Mexican appropriation of foreign body culture centered around symbolic masculinity, national identity, and the Mexicanization of "modern" sport.¹¹⁶ As J.A. Mangan has argued, the appropriation of modern sport from its roots in Western Europe and the United States took place in Latin America "willingly...without European coercion and not a great deal of persuasion."¹¹⁷ While this is undoubtedly true when the importation of body culture and sport are compared to the more blatant and purposeful examples of American neo-

¹¹⁴ Economic historians O'Rourke and Williamson focus on the long nineteenth century development of the Atlantic economy, ending with the outbreak of World War in 1914. Their approach is extended to Latin America by Topic, Marichal and Frank. See: Kevin H. O'Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Globalization and History: The Evolution of a Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999); and Steven Topik, Carlos Marichal, and Zephyr L. Frank, eds., *From Silver to Cocaine: Latin American Commodity Chains and the Building of the World Economy, 1500-2000* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006). The knowledge of "physical culture," as will be shown in this chapter, was a type of transnational commodity that followed these capital flows.

¹¹⁵ The appropriation and encouragement as a symbol of modernity, especially in developing countries, is an idea put forth by a broad array of scholars, see, among others: James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger *Modernity and Mass Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

¹¹⁶ Jim Smith was remembered by several prominent Mexicans in their memoirs as a boxer and teacher, among them the socialist statesman and lawyer Victor Manuel Villaseñor, *Memorias de un hombre de izquierda* (México: Biografías Ganesa, 1976). There are also brief accounts of some of his bouts in overviews of Mexican history such as Gustavo Casasola, *Seis siglos de historia gráfica de México, 1325-1900* (México: Ediciones G. Casasola, 1966). The term "journeyman" has a long history in boxing terminology. It generally refers to highly mobile boxers of varying skill who travel in search of increasingly lucrative opportunities or "purses." For a transnational account of African-American boxers who fit this description around the turn of the twentieth century see Theresa Runstedtler, *Boxing's Rebel Sojourner: Jack Johnson and the Global Color Line* (under contract with University of California Press).

¹¹⁷ J.A. Mangan and Lamartine DaCosta, Eds., *Sport in Latin American Society: Past and Present* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), pp. 1-4.

imperialism (economic and diplomatic/military) in Latin America; the process of cultural appropriation deserves greater attention. Individuals like Jim Smith, assisted by growing transnational media, changing gender and corporeal norms, and Mexican entrepreneurs and athletes dedicated to cultivating the virile national body, established the roots of this process.

Arriving in Mexico City by August of 1907, Smith joined Mexican-African-American boxer (“one-quarter black”) Kid Mitchell, African-American (“mulatto”) Kid Levigne, Puerto Rican Kid Lavergne, the Turkish bodybuilder and wrestler Rahain, the Italian wrestler Romulus, Canadian boxer Jack Connell, the “Boer” (South African) Strongman “Otto,” the Japanese jiu-jitsu professor known as Conde Koma (Mitsuyo Maeda) and dozens of other foreign professors of physical culture.¹¹⁸ Smith quickly took his place among a growing number of transnational athletes who plied their trade in the theaters, clubs, schools, and private homes of the Mexican elite.¹¹⁹ The skills and culture brought by these marginal journeymen became part of what one scholar has called a “means to modernity,” in an increasingly global marketplace for ideas and cultural alignments.¹²⁰ While foreign investors like Ennis changed the face of the Mexican countryside through the construction of railroads, bridges, mines, and factories, men like Smith,

¹¹⁸ Though Kid Mitchell received laudatory press coverage in this period, he was later remembered by the boxer Policarpo Santa Maria as an arrogant, tobacco chewing, dirty fighter who spit alcohol in the eyes of his opponents. Talán, *Y...Fueron Idolos!*.

¹¹⁹ One writer for the newspaper *Excelsior* remembered Kid Mitchell and Kid Levigne as “those two darkies,” who drew huge crowds in the years immediately prior to the Mexican Revolution. *Excelsior*, 3 October 1922. Their racial identities remain mysterious, for example, a newspaper in El Paso, Texas claimed that Kid Mitchell was a Mexican-American fighter, perhaps living in Juárez, Mexico who had been living and fighting in Mexico City. After prizefighting was outlawed in 1910 by fiat of the Governor of Mexico City, Landa y Escandón, Mitchell returned to the United States to ply his trade. See: *El Paso Herald*, 21 April 1910. Kid Levigne fought for several years in and around Mexico City, before becoming a jockey in the high stakes profession of horse racing for a wealthy Mexican hacienda owner, Sr. Martínez Roma. “Kid Levigne Pays a Visit to Mexico,” *MH*, 26 March 1910; *El Paso Herald*, 20 April 1910; *El Imparcial* 27 February 1910; *MH*, 3 March 1910; *MH*, 15 March 1910; *El Diario*, 2 August 1909. The use of the term “professor” to describe many of these athletes was part of the attempt to validate and elevate these athletes by making them teachers of a valuable and modern skill. Almost all of these expatriates found a thriving community of their fellow nationals in Mexico City. For example, the wrestler A. Rahain, the “turco,” took part in a banquet in Chapultepec Park thrown by the shopowners and businessmen of the “Ottoman Community” to celebrate the restoration of the Constitution and the flight of Sultan Abdul Hamid in 1909. *El Diario*, 25 July 1910.

¹²⁰ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, p. 110.

through improvisation and seeking financial opportunity, laid the groundwork for the expanding boundaries of *lo mexicano*. While foreign economic interest often relied on the coercive power of American diplomatic backing, individuals like Smith were self-promoters, relying more on personal charisma to convince Mexicans of the importance of what they represented.

The popularity of these athletes and performers was spurred forward by important innovations in the Mexican press that qualitatively and quantitatively changed the consumption of local and international news.¹²¹ The availability of new technologies of visual reproduction allowed for the mass dissemination of risqué images of the semi-nude athlete's body in precisely the same period when imported blood sport and novel ideas about corporeality saturated the public sphere. New *clubes* dedicated to physical culture occupied central locations in the seat of Mexican power and culture, the *zócalo*. The Mexican *profesores* of these clubs were identified by the government as national examples of masculine attainment and were tapped from the private to the public sphere to educate the next generation of Mexican men in new ideas about the male body.¹²²

The shifting nature of representation and advertising in the popular media, embodied most clearly in the rise of the newspaper *El Imparcial* and the weekly illustrated magazine *El*

¹²¹ The technological advances in media production of visual culture in the first years of the twentieth century have been masterfully examined by John Mraz. The first mass produced images (other than *cartas de visita*) in newspapers and magazines were sensational pictures of crime and criminals (followed closely by risqué pictures of male athletes). The rise of *El Imparcial*, central to this project, was the first instance of media produced for a mass audience (it cost one tenth that of other contemporary newspapers) and increasingly published images as part of its news coverage. The use of photography was central to these changes as it lent legitimacy and a higher "truth factor," ostensibly. See John Mraz, *Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009). See also: Yolanda Argudín and María Luna Argudín, *Historia del periodismo en México: desde el Virreinato hasta nuestros días* (México, D.F.: Panorama Editorial, 1987); Emma Cecilia García Krinsky, Rosa Casanova, and Claudia Canales, *Imaginario y fotografía en México: 1839-1970* (Barcelona: Lunweg, 2005) and Clara Guadalupe García, *El imparcial: primer periódico moderno de México* (México: Centro de Estudios Históricos del Porfiriato, 2003).

¹²² Professor Enrique Ugartechea, the well traveled Mexican strongman who became an educator, will be examined later in the chapter.

Mundo Ilustrado, both operated by media innovator and entrepreneur Rafael Reyes Espíndola, brought images of crime, athletics, and high and low culture within the reach of even illiterate Mexicans. The first generation of Mexican photojournalists, most salient among them the Casasola brothers and later Enrique Díaz, increasingly brought images of athletic masculine ideals to a broad audience.¹²³ The ubiquity of these images generated for and by popular culture resonates today in the boxing and *lucha libre* publications, televised events, and dedicated venues that regularly attract tens of thousands of spectators throughout Mexico and millions viewers for nationalist inflected contests that pit Mexicans, wrapped in the flag, against foreigners.

The seeds of this popular culture phenomenon began during the late Porfiriato. Mexico City on the eve of the centennial and the beginning of the Revolution (1910) was a cosmopolitan center of about five hundred thousand people and the showcase for the carefully constructed project of Mexican modernity.¹²⁴ Here the order and progress much vaunted by the *científicos* clashed with the informal and improvisational cultures taking root and expanding within civil society.¹²⁵ As this chapter will show, the debates around prizefighting and Mexican culture in this period centered on issues of social control: Who would be responsible for defining the

¹²³ Mraz, *Looking for Mexico*.

¹²⁴ Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, "1910 Mexico City: Space and Nation in the City of the *Centerario*," in William H. Beezley and David E. Lorey, *¡Viva Mexico!, ¡Viva La Independencia!: Celebrations of September 16* (Wilmington, Del: SR Books, 2001), pp. 167-190. Tenorio-Trillo shows convincingly that the elaborate centennial celebrations marked both the high water mark and the beginning of the end of the Porfirian ideals of modernity and cosmopolitanism in the Mexican capital. As John Mraz and Pablo Piccato have shown, the media played central and highly regulated role in the representation of Mexico City as a paragon of modernity. See. John Mraz, *Looking for Mexico* and Pablo Piccato, *The Tyranny of Opinion*.

¹²⁵ The term "científico" identified those government and business functionaries (both Mexican and foreign) during the Porfiriato who sought to harness scientific means of administration and business practice to push Mexico, as a whole, toward a Western-oriented vision of order and progress, a particular vision of modernity. During the Porfiriato, the científicos and their dominance of the Díaz government's economic policies attracted controversy, with one well known oppositionist arguing that "It is a falsehood and a solemn lie that the "científicos" are friends of the country and General Díaz, because they love nothing but money and a well remunerated job." Didapp, Juan Pedro Didapp, *Explotadores políticos de México; Bulnes y el Partido científico ante el derecho ajeno* (Mexico: Tip. de los succ. de F. Díaz de León, 1904). The term came into general use, both within and beyond Mexico in the late Porfirian Era.

boundaries of permissibility amid public sphere debate of what *was* and *was not mexican*? How would the relationship between the public sphere and government institutions charged with regulating mass spectacles take shape amid changing cultural and gender norms? By the time Jim Smith sat for mandatory photographs to complete his file for the registry of foreigners in 1940, the culture of pugilism had been transformed from a cautious elite's sampling of foreign culture, to an expression of working class national identity and masculinity.¹²⁶ By the 1920s, the suitability of boxing for Mexican culture, once debated in terms of unique Mexican traditions under threat from modernization, the rising "arrogance" of the popular classes, and the unsuitability of Mexican bodies for violent sport, was largely beyond debate (in the public sphere, at least).

In the years leading up to the Mexican Revolution, these inter-racial cultural intermediaries and their entourages traveled the length and breadth of Mexico. News of their "Mexican championships," reached across the border into the United States.¹²⁷ Their mobile "exhibitions," as they were most often advertised (giving them a veneer of legality as prizefighting had uncertain legal status), were precursors to the popular fascination with the sport

¹²⁶This transition forms much of the substance of Chapter Three. Several essays in Matthew C. Gutman, *Changing Men and Masculinities in Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), argue for the central role of sport in constituting masculinity across a broad range of Latin American cultures, see: Norma Fuller's essay, "Gender Identity Among Peruvian Males," and Mara Viveros Vigoya, "Latin American Perspectives on Masculinity." Recently, 2010, several Mexican headlines have associated the celebration of the bicentennial of Independence with the conquest of new international boxing titles as a point of national pride: "The Bicentennial Gives us New Champions," *Azteca Deportes*, <http://www.aztecadeportes.com/notas/box-azteca/20670/el-bicentenario-nos-regala-nuevos-Campeones>; "Boxing, the Pride of Mexico," *El Universal*, 12 June 2009. Chapter Four examines representations of boxing and boxers in Mexican popular culture of the 1930s and 40s through film, the popular press, and specialized *revistas*.

¹²⁷ The term champion, variously transliterated as *Champeon*, *Champeonato*, or *Campeón*, was a generic term used by Mexican writers and American promoters to describe virtually anyone who claimed to be an experienced and even marginally successful athlete. Not until the 1920s were there official and organizationally recognized titles for Mexican champions. Hence, for this chapter, unless otherwise noted, the term champion is used following the self-designations of various athletes or their promoters, not to denote an officially recognized title. See: "Battle for the Mexican Title," *Ogden Morning Examiner* (Ogden, Utah), 27 March 1910; "Over Long Route for Mexican Ring Title," *The Salt Lake Herald Republican*, 27 March 1910; "Ketchel's Sparring Mate Now a Champion," *The San Francisco Call*, 27 March 1910.

that, by the cessation of the violent phase of the Revolution, filled newly constructed venues with tens of thousands of spectators and became a means to represent national virility in a transnational context. Mexican boxers from urban environments wore peasant garb to the ring and literally wrapped themselves in the flag to confront foreigners.¹²⁸

As the process of nationalization unfolded, foreign nationals impugned Mexican manhood through stylized *retos* (challenges) published in the Mexican press, challenging anyone, of any nationality, to meet them in violent sport in front of curious and judgmental spectators. These challenges took place amid frequent public discourses on race, boxing, and United States' culture that featured prominently in Mexico City dailies and *revistas*.¹²⁹ In response, Mexicans from across the class spectrum like Patricio Martínez Arredondo, Cuauhtémoc Aguilar, Salvador Esperón, and Enrique Ugartechea: *relojero* (watch repair man), stage actor, elite scion of a Oaxacan family, and Veracruz born “strongman,” respectively, altered established careers to make the Mexican appropriation of the lucrative and novel “virile sport” their life’s work.¹³⁰ These cultural flows progressed via multiple channels as Mexican athletes increasingly ventured north to compete and learn in the gymnasiums and prize rings in the United States. Enrique Ugartechea, for example, traveled to the St. Louis Olympic Games

¹²⁸ As will be examined in Chapter Three, this enormous popularity ran counter to state initiatives to create popular engagement and appreciation for certain types of team sport like basketball and baseball that were thought to have redemptive social value. Boxing, often the subject of conflicting legislation, was first officially repressed and then grudgingly recognized and tolerated as an activity of the masses. My periodization of the Revolution follows generally accepted chronologies: though violence did not end in 1920, the triumph of Álvaro Obregón signaled the cessation of the most significant military battles. The Cristero Revolt of the late-1920s is the major exception to this generalization. See: Michael J. Gonzales, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910 – 1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002) and Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution (Two Volumes)* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

¹²⁹ See, for example: “Clarke y Smith,” *La Voz de México*, 12 March 1895; “La Lucha Mitchell-Esperón,” *El Imparcial*, 12 August 1906; “Un torneo de esgrima en el Teatro Abreu,” *La Voz de México*, 10 December 1907. (Here the boxing match is described as “truly savage,” while fencing is lauded as “a beautiful and even hygienic entertainment”); “El Campeón Cunnell [sic] reta a Smith” *El Imparcial*, 4 March 1910; and “Los Retos de E. Spinner,” *El Imparcial*, 9 March 1910.

¹³⁰ As will be examined later in this chapter and in Chapter Three, Salvador Esperón was an interpreter of Nahuatl poetry who became a boxing instructor for the Mexican military. Patricio Martínez Arredondo was a working-class repairman who became one of the earliest and most controversial boxers in Mexico.

and World Exposition in 1904 as an unofficial representative of Mexico. Soon after his return almost a year later, he opened a well-known gymnasium two blocks from the zócalo where he unveiled his newly imported physical culture “machines” and instructed Mexicans on the “modern” ways to shape and conceptualize the male body.¹³¹ Skirting official repression, these Mexican and foreign athletes hastened the diffusion of modern sport throughout the country by seeking out those towns where no law against prizefighting existed, or where local politicians and theater owners were willing to weather the anger of the Porfirian machine in order to collect the revenues from these popular entertainments.¹³²

Modernist writers like José Juan Tablada, Amado Nervo, and Federico Gamboa and the Mexican pianist Alberto Villaseñor explored whether the nascent popularity of boxing symbolized cultural regression or positivist progress as Tablada engaged physical culture through managing boxing gyms and Mexican and American boxers in the first decade of the twentieth century. Tablada hoped to mold aristocratic young men into cosmopolitan, poetry loving masculine ideals.¹³³ Nervo and Gamboa rejected the sport as barbaric, futile, and ill-suited for Mexican temperament. For Tablada, who became a lifelong critic of the culture of boxing in the United States and Mexico, the appropriation of such cultural forms was also indicative of a turn away from elite Francophilia toward an embrace of the brash and “simplistic” cultural affinities of the United States.¹³⁴ The use of the moniker “Kid” to denote Mexican athletes

¹³¹ Later in this chapter I will examine the travels and career of Ugartechea in-depth.

¹³² As will be examined in this chapter, the town where local authorities were most likely to disregard federal prohibitions were those like El Oro and Pachuca, where foreigner (mostly American and British) companies accounted for a large part of local economic activity.

¹³³ Ciro B. Ceballos and Luz América Viveros Anaya, *Panorama mexicano 1890-1910: (memorias); Al siglo XIX, ida y regreso* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Coordinación de Humanidades, 2006), p. 256. Amado Nervo, Francisco González Guerrero, and Alfonso Méndez Plancarte, *Obras completas* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1962), p. 616. Tablada and Villaseñor served as seconds in an illegal prizefight featuring Esperón and Colín.

¹³⁴ There has been much written on the “Francophile” tastes of the Mexican elite, but as Tenorio-Trillo argues, this preference for all things French must be viewed not as a national fascination but that Mexican elites were not

figured prominently in a list of other “Americanizations” like the changing format of newspapers, the introduction of soft drinks, and other “nefarious” changes in Mexico that solidified a turn from France toward the United States.¹³⁵

The novel spaces created by modern sport within the public sphere grew in popularity and lucrative potential in tandem with urbanization, industrialization, and the development of entertainment industries, but Mexican boxing maintained its original association with virile action, scandal, and normative cultural change throughout the period under study.¹³⁶ Due to its association with the lower-classes, gambling, and “scandal,” boxing was a cultural import that represented what Tenorio-Trillo has called the “urban and even cultural anti-ideals.”¹³⁷ A divergent line of reasoning that emanated from the public sphere cited pugilism and wrestling as eugenic solutions to the decadent forces of urbanization, a way to strengthen fragile male constitutions for the Spencerian struggle for life.

The most important transformation between the late-Porfirian era and the end of the Revolution was the process of nationalization that converted a marginal and exotic practice into mainstream Mexican culture where it became a means to express working class national identity, transnational Mexican virility, and aspirational means of upward mobility.¹³⁸ The diverse loci of dissemination for this novel culture included the transnational media, intrapersonal contacts with foreign athletes, enormously popular “exhibitions” and the growing organizational infrastructure

seeking to be French, specifically, merely to be modern.” Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 20.

¹³⁵ Rubén Lozano Herrera, *Las veras y las burlas de José Juan Tablada* (México, D.F.: Universidad Iberoamericana, Departamento de Historia, 1995).

¹³⁶ As Stephen Riess has noted, the growth of sport in the United States was tied to urbanization and movements to counter the perceived debilitating effects of urban life. This process took place in Mexico at roughly the same moment. Steven Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

¹³⁷ Tenorio-Trillo, “1910 Mexico City,” p. 189.

¹³⁸ This transformation is examined in Chapter Three.

of voluntary clubs and associations dedicated to the propagation of modern sport. These organizations and the critical writings of private individuals arguing in the public sphere called for a loosening of government prohibitions and an expansion of the boundaries of Mexican culture to encompass a wider and more “modern” vision of manliness and civilization.¹³⁹

Unearthing the Informal: Molding Tastes and *Afición* between the Private and Public Spheres

Pablo Piccato’s recent work channels Habermas on the evolution of the public sphere in late-nineteenth century Mexico and encourages a reevaluation of the private/public dichotomy and the role of public opinion in understanding the culture of the era. In his studies on dueling, the press, and masculine honor, Piccato stresses that “we should focus less on stable ideals and concepts and more on the practical dimension of historically situated local and personal interactions.”¹⁴⁰ He examines representations in the expanding popular press and the use of those documents to illustrate the creation of consensus through rational argument that drew upon unstable cultural ideas in the late nineteenth century. These malleable and volatile concepts and behaviors, particularly the use of the European-import of dueling to settle issues of aristocratic personal honor, illustrate the melding of foreign technologies of honor-defense onto local

¹³⁹ Examined in this chapter, the phrase “Manliness and Civilization,” is borrowed from Gail Bederman’s study of the cultures of masculinity and race in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century United States. Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹⁴⁰ Pablo Piccato, *The Tyranny of Opinion: Honor in the Construction of the Mexican Public Sphere* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 11. Habermas’s now classic definition of the public sphere is “The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the private sphere come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rule governing relations.” He further characterizes the public sphere as “the public use of reason.”

conditions.¹⁴¹ This chapter extends the chronological reach of Piccato's arguments while examining a new avenue for the cultural history of this period.

Journalists in the late Porfiriato wielded a high degree of "cultural capital," and served, through their editorial musings, as intermediaries who negotiated the impact of changing norms of behavior and cultural alignments in the realm of public opinion.¹⁴² As Elías José Palti has posited, Mexican journalists generally fit into two interrelated models, the "juridical" and the "proselytist."¹⁴³ This study engages that model under which journalists made normative judgments based on rational arguments concerning the suitability of Mexicans, and by extension Mexican culture, to appropriate imported body culture and modern sport. Beyond mere descriptions of events, they conveyed to their readers a set of qualitative evaluations that, while necessarily idiosyncratic, were intended to speak in the name of public opinion. The language of that engagement was saturated with gendered and nationalist evaluations of the factors that made a man "good at being a man" within a cultural milieu in which "sporting prowess [was increasingly] a test for masculinity."¹⁴⁴

The imagination of masculinity and its relationship to national identity are among the unstable (and understudied) ideas that were deployed around the Mexican appropriation of foreign cultural practices during this period. Though William Beezeley has characterized what he calls the "Porfirian Persuasion" as, in part, the attraction of elite Mexicans to foreign cultural practices due to their exoticism and status exhibiting qualities (such as owning and riding a

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Piccato, *The Tyranny of Opinion*, pp. 13-17.

¹⁴³ Elías José Palti, *La invención de una legitimidad razón y retórica en el pensamiento mexicano del siglo XIX* (Ciudad de Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica., 2006), pp. 52-53.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, *The Tyranny of Opinion*; and R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 37. Connell correctly notes that the gauge for masculinity embodied in modern sports "which we now take for granted," was not a historical inevitability, but was "produced historically."

velocipede), the evidence in the form of public debate and private initiative calls this generalization into question.¹⁴⁵ This study seeks to situate the Mexican encounter with transnational boxing in its cross-class, interracial, and highly controversial dimensions as more than a celebration of novelty for novelty's sake. The melding of diverse cultural inputs into the Mexican vernacular often represented a profound and soul searching encounter where Mexicans contested and created the fundamental bases of *Mexicanidad*.¹⁴⁶ This process defies the traditional periodization of Mexican history into pre and post Revolutionary periods. Individuals like Baldomero Romero and José Juan Tablada bridged the Revolutionary era and continued their engagement with modern athletics in spite of the massive cultural shifts usually associated with that meta-event.

Through the idiom of appropriation and rejection, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century press sought to define Mexican national identity on the most fundamental level of behaviors and tastes. The arguments over boxing as barbaric and foreign drew on ideas of morality and knowledge in an attempt to set boundaries of permissiveness. By the end of the Porfiriato, however, the moralizing editorials appeared less frequently, giving way to a resigned coverage of pugilism. The examination of these sources constitutes a counterpoint to the general

¹⁴⁵ William H. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2004).

¹⁴⁶ Eric Hobsbawm's ideas on the oppositional nature of the "invention of tradition," are particularly helpful here. He argues that the imagination of the nation often is a product of defining the national self in terms what it is not. Sport, in particular, in this period gives a useful window onto both "national" identities and traditions and the construction of class identities. Hobsbawm characterizes sport as "one of the most significant of the new social practices of our period..." See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 298. Beezley, for example, grossly oversimplifies this process when he claims that (writing about boxing) "During the Porfirian years it demonstrated only the influence of foreigners, the imitative quality of the Mexican elite, and the desire for excitement in a comfortable, secure society." Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club*, p. 35.

patterns of cultural mimesis that inform much of the historiographical understanding of this period.¹⁴⁷

Mexican observers dissected the significance of *el deporte viril* more intimately than other imports like baseball and styles of dress precisely because boxing was so controversial in its points of origin and in its local manifestations.¹⁴⁸ The rising popularity of pugilism called into question Mexican ideas about barbarity, control of the *populacho*, race, and the impunity and influence of foreigners resident in Mexico. Pugilism must be understood as a polarizing cultural phenomenon in the historical context of this period when it was ridiculed, celebrated, and intensely debated; serving as fodder for diverse enunciations of what Mexico was, could and should be, and which sectors of society were to define the limits of national inclusion. As illustrated in the introduction, these debates ranged from the highest levels (Porfirio Díaz, various governors and public intellectuals) to public sphere engagement in the form of individual choices: those who spent scarce pesos on tickets, lessons, and equipment and who were willing to risk their safety by taking up the challenge of foreign athletes suggests the attraction of these emerging behaviors.

As Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo has shown, the Porfirian elite sought to harness foreign and positivist cultural influences by both portraying Mexico as a modernizing nation while learning from other exemplar “races” during a series of world’s fairs in the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.¹⁴⁹ Controls of the press and the prosecution of individuals who

¹⁴⁷ Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Culture of Empire: American Writers, Mexico, and Mexican Immigrants, 1880-1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); John Rutherford, *Mexican Society During the Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Henry Conrad Schmidt, *The Roots of "Lo Mexicano": Self and Society in Mexican Thought, 1900-1934* (College Station, [Texas]; London: Texas A&M University Press, 1978).

¹⁴⁸ See the Introduction.

¹⁴⁹ Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

portrayed Mexico in a light deemed unflattering by the government reflected this concern with the construction of Mexico as modern.¹⁵⁰ The Mexican engagement with sport both mirrored and diverged from this pattern. Boxing was undeniably foreign (modern), but it was also indicative for many Mexican observers of the detritus of “Anglo” modernity: while both aristocrats and the masses avidly followed and engaged in the low culture of boxing, several Mexican writers sought to couch the growing popularity of the sport in the positivist language of eugenics to soften the blow to deeply imbedded conceptions of propriety. During the late Porfirian era, they transformed the debate on physical culture from one of pointless barbarity into a patriotic endeavor that showed Mexican progress and masculine nationhood.¹⁵¹

Before and during the Mexican Revolution, amid the macro-social upheavals that have been the subject of so much Mexican historiography, men like Smith established themselves as “professors” of the “virile arts” including Japanese jiu-jitsu, boxing, and “catch-as-catch-can,” an early form of professional wrestling. The going rate (not including side bets) for victory in a boxing match in 1907 in Mexico City was generally around five hundred dollars or one thousand pesos, enabling men like Smith and several young Mexican athletes like the journeyman professor of physical culture Enrique Ugartechea to earn roughly five-hundred times the daily wage for a skilled worker.¹⁵² In the early years of the twentieth century, Smith, Ugartechea and dozens of other black, white, and mixed-race athletes from around the world lived and worked in

¹⁵⁰ Mraz, *Looking for Mexico*, pp. 13-59.

¹⁵¹ The conflict between public opinion and government prohibitions will be examined later in this chapter.

¹⁵² Wage rates during this period have received considerable attention from historians. Farm workers generally earned less than one dollar per day. Those deemed skilled, such as railroad workers earned from seventy-five cents to one dollar per day. A skilled textile worker in 1906 earned up to \$1.25 per day. See: Teresa Miriam Van Hoy, *A Social History of Mexico's Railroads: Peons, Prisoners, and Priests* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), p. 65. The amounts earned by boxers in this period figured prominently in both the newspapers *El Imparcial* and *The Mexican Herald*. One 1907 bout promised to pay the winner the enormous sum of one thousand dollars, with the loser receiving five hundred. *MH*, 12 November 1907.

virtually every region of Mexico. These transnational journeys and their divisive and contentious reception by Mexicans from a broad range of social classes constitute a novel window into the dynamic transformations taking place in Mexican culture as Mexicans looked without and within to define themselves.

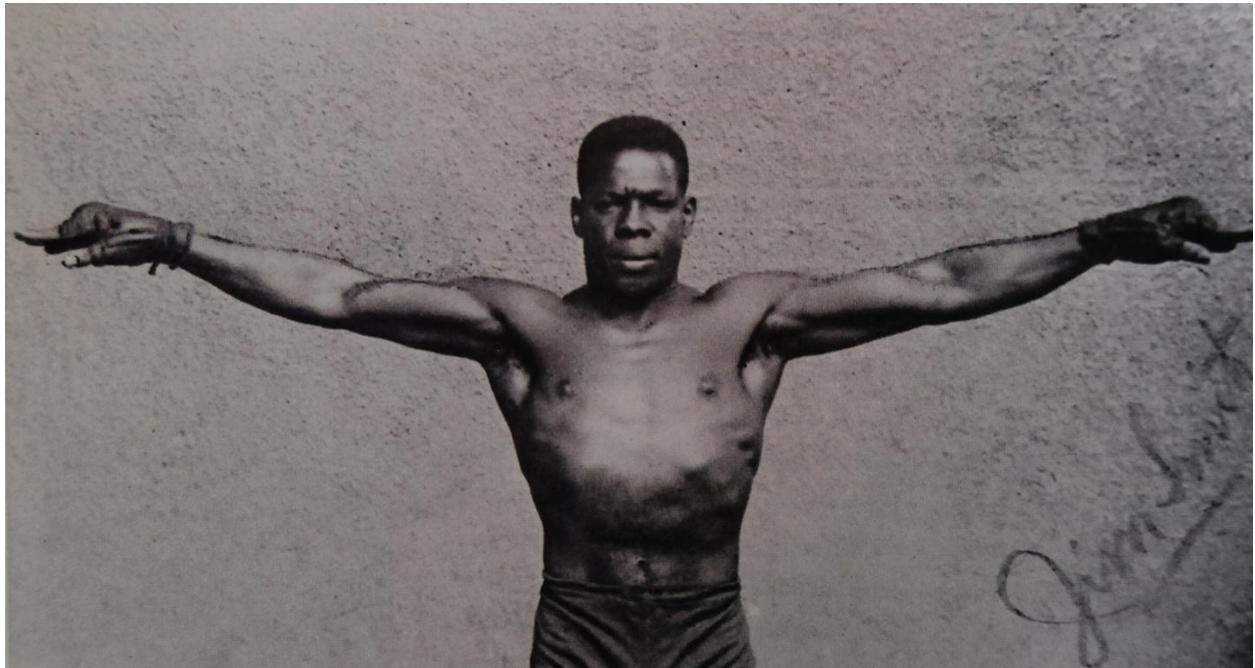


Figure 1: Jim Smith, circa 1910, Courtesy of the Archivo Casasola

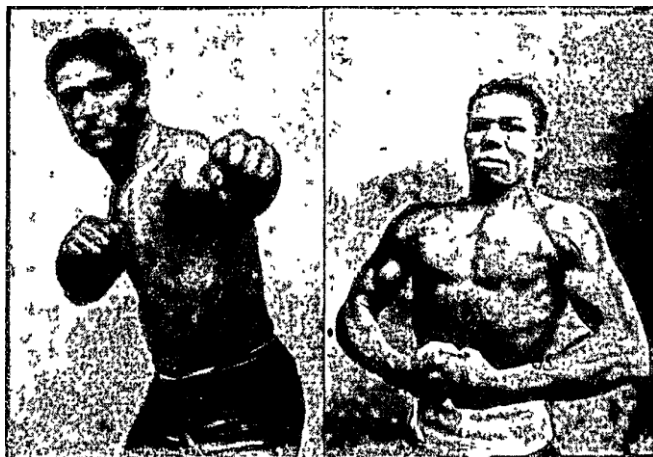


Figure 2: Cuauhtémoc Aguilar and Jim Smith, *El Imparcial*.

In July of 1910, amid the expanding national crisis that would convert the entire Mexican landscape into a revolutionary war zone, the public sphere grappled with the transnational implications of modern “physical culture” as sport spectacles became increasingly visible in Mexico City and throughout the nation.¹⁵³ Racially charged debates focused on concerted attempts to transform nationalized bodies into virile forms that mirrored imported models of modern manhood.¹⁵⁴ Nascent civic-social groups, like the *Club Atlético de México*, the *Club Olímpico*, *Club Ugartechea de Cultura Física*, and others, pressed the Mexico City government to tolerate and endorse “spectacles of virile masculinity” to be performed in front of a paying public. It became increasingly evident in this period that the extant bureaucratic infrastructure that defined the permissibility of public entertainments was ill-suited to contain and direct the desire of Mexicans to stage and attend these novel spectacles. More often than not, these often

¹⁵³ As explained in the Introduction, my understanding of the public sphere as a stage for social discourse is drawn from the works of Habermas and his subsequent critics. I envision the public sphere as the prime location where social and cultural ideas are debated, appropriated, transformed or rejected by a diverse set of nongovernmental actors. The public sphere is composed of associations and clubs, editorials, advertising, letters to the editor, and entertainment among other sources of information and debate. If a public sphere moment could be distilled it might be two individuals talking on a street corner about current events while waiting for the trolley or in this case, an autonomous social club debating its purpose. The creation and evolution of the public sphere, and this is precisely the incremental change that I am interested in, also entails the creation of new spaces where public consensus and popular opinion are negotiated/created. Both of these changing products are difficult to trace because they crystallize only briefly before being modified yet again. See: Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989); Craig J. Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992); Nick Crossley and John Michael Roberts, *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

¹⁵⁴ *Archivo Histórico del Distrito Federal* (Historical Archive of Mexico City, hereafter referred to as AHDF), *Fondo: Juegos Permitidos*, Tomo 14, Exp. 888. The literary scholar Robert Irwin’s important study on Mexican masculinity is one of a growing number of works on how these ideas were expressed in Mexico in the twentieth century. Irwin’s literary analysis focuses largely on representations and fears of homosexuality and the “effeminate” man and yields important insights into an understanding of how elite discourse on the margins of masculine definition played out during the twentieth century. This dissertation furthers this field of knowledge by examining the implementation of these ideas on the level of daily life and behavior. See: Robert McKee Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). Other recent works that touch on the constructions and representations of masculinity in Mexico include Sergio de la Mora, *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006) and Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba, *Modernity and the Nation in Mexican Representations of Masculinity: From Sensuality to Bloodshed*, (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). I build on these works by examining boxing and physical culture, which are ignored by the previously mentioned studies. One outstanding yet unpublished dissertation deals with Mexican-American boxing as a locus for identity construction in the United States: Gregory S. Rodríguez, *Palaces of Pain - Arenas of Mexican-American Dreams: Boxing and the Formation of Ethnic Mexican Identities in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Thesis [Ph. D.]—University of California, San Diego, 1999).

creative and forcefully argued petitions were denied. The repetition of these denials, in which boxing was singled out amid other similar behaviors as particularly distasteful, impelled aficionados like Baldomero Romero to collect hundreds of signatures appended to carefully worded and capacious arguments that sought to force the government to reconsider. While the public sphere challenged the government, the Mexican, African-American, Japanese, and Anglo-American athletes who had set up shop in Mexico City had to make due by offering private lessons to the middle and upper classes and traveling to other areas of Mexico beyond the immediate reach of the capital's bureaucracy.¹⁵⁵

The growing presence of boxing and other combat sports emerged amid voluminous media exposure of the racial tensions resulting from the boxing match of the “Great White Hope” (Jim Jefferies) and the “Bad Nigger” (Jack Johnson) in the United States.¹⁵⁶ *El Imparcial*, the “first modern newspaper of Mexico,” asked its readers, “Are there any whites alive who can snatch the title away from Johnson?”¹⁵⁷ *El Dictámen* of Veracruz translated Jack London's soul-searching ruminations upon the defeat of the White Hope. London was shocked to admit to an international audience, including Mexicans, that Johnson had surprised white observers by not showing the “yellow streak” of cowardice that was supposedly the mark of all blacks.¹⁵⁸ *El Diario*, a newspaper in which cartoons were uncommon, printed images of a muscular Jefferies

¹⁵⁵ Among others who sought out foreign athletes for lessons in physical culture were authors José Juan Tablada and Federico Gamboa, both of whom will be examined in this chapter and in Chapter Four.

¹⁵⁶ This match, which received wide newspaper coverage in Mexico, took place on July 4, 1910 between “Bad Nigger” Jack Johnson, and the Great White Hope Jim Jefferies, in Reno, Nevada. The term bad nigger is borrowed from Al-Toni Gilmore's biography of Johnson and his representation by the contemporary media. See: Gilmore, Al-Toni. *Bad Nigger!: The National Impact of Jack Johnson* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1975).

¹⁵⁷ “The Hope of the Whites,” *El Imparcial*, 6 July 1910. *El Imparcial* was among the first Mexican newspapers, along with the American edited Mexican Herald, to receive extensive telegraphic cables of news from abroad. See: Clara Guadalupe García, *El imparcial: primer periódico moderno de México* (México: Centro de Estudios Históricos del Porfiriato, 2003).

¹⁵⁸ As a journalist, Jack London had followed Jack Johnson's career, making the trip in 1908 to Australia where Johnson became the first black heavyweight boxing champion in his bout against a white Canadian, “Critica de la lucha Jefferies Johnson,” *El Dictámen*, 23 July 1910, p. 2; “American fighters enjoying long sea trip to Australia.” *MH* 30, October 1910.

standing ready to crush the stereotyped inflated lips of a bewildered Jack Johnson.¹⁵⁹ *La Patria* reported about hundreds of police officers necessary to keep jubilant *negros* in check after Johnson's victory.¹⁶⁰ Mexican readers learned of Johnson's every move, his beautiful white wife, his expensive tastes, and how he enraged white America. As one Mexican commentator phrased it, "this thing that a pugilist of the Ethiopian race dominates a Caucasian is depressing."¹⁶¹

Mexicans read that Johnson was more than a simple and brutish athlete; he was a threat to white dominance over lesser races, his power directly tied to the medium of his celebrity. He planned to take a victory lap around the world, stopping in such places as British India, China, and Japan. There he would give boxing exhibitions and speeches about race relations. "Surely," one editorialist mused, the negro pugilist would talk about how the "yellow" and "black races" should dominate the white."¹⁶² Shortly after Johnson's victory over the White Hope, the Mexican boxer and actor Cuauhtémoc Aguilar set off on a tour of Mexico, starting on the Oaxacan coast, with his team of "mulatto" and "negro" boxers, including one crowd pleaser named "Young Jack Johnson."¹⁶³ The public, it seemed, did not share the editorialist's fear that Johnson represented a threat to racial hierarchy. In the small coastal town of Salina Cruz (Oaxaca), during the enactment of the saint's festival celebrated from "time immemorial," families came from all over the region to watch the *negro* Jack Johnson take on the Mexican champion, Aguilar.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ "El gran Campeonato de box Jefferies-Johnson," *El Diario*, 7 April 1910.

¹⁶⁰ "El Regreso de Johnson a Chicago," *La Patria*, 8 July 1910; "Aprehensión de Johnson," *El Imparcial*, 27 November 1910.

¹⁶¹ "El Contrincante de Johnson," *El Dictamen*, 22 September 1910.

¹⁶² "Jack Johnson Dará la Vuelta al Mundo," *El Diario*, 16 July 1911.

¹⁶³ "Se Concertó un Match de Box," *El Imparcial*, 6 May 1911; "La Tournee [sic] Cuauhtemoc Aguilar," *El Imparcial*, 10 May 1911.

¹⁶⁴ "El Match Johnson Aguilar," *El Imparcial*, 19 May 1911. This news appeared with the announcement that the previously reported news, that the town of Salina Cruz had been taken by rebels, was false and that Felix Díaz was taking over the city. The boxing show then moved to Puebla, within easy travelling distance of Mexico City, and to which "an infinite" number of Mexico City fans planned travel for the bout. The boxers challenged each other

Blurring the high-low cultural divide, Mexicans read boxing commentaries and the normative musings of such literary “geniuses” as Enrique Gómez Carrillo, whose accounts of European culture were brought to Mexico City readers.¹⁶⁵ Gómez Carrillo portrayed boxing as the most fashionable and well attended of all public spectacles in Paris, outstripping even the Paris Opera. Far from barbaric, boxing was essential for any modern urban man. Its practice was ennobling and it gave men control and security over their corporeal selves in public.¹⁶⁶ Stressing that the highly cultured French, along with the English and Americans, were devotees of pugilism likely lent Gómez Carrillo’s assertions greater legitimacy.

Amid these racially and nationally inflected commentaries, competition, disciplining of one’s body, and the expenditure of primal energies through spectatorship and participation in sport marked Mexican men as modern participants of the cosmopolitan public sphere. This was, at least, how many Mexicans justified and expressed their growing fascination with displays of virile masculinity. These flows of information and the impact of novel ideas that embedded national progress in the development of masculine behaviors and physiques saturated dialogue in the press and on the streets of the capital city through advertisements and the transformation of theaters, homes, clubs and other venues into arenas for education and combat.¹⁶⁷

through the columns of newspapers like “Asalto entre C. Aguilar y J. Johnson,” *El Diario*, 5 July 1911; “Reto al Campeón Tijera,” *El Imparcial*, 25 July 1911. “Un desafío a Carlos de la Tijera,” *El Diario*, 26 July 1911.

¹⁶⁵ Enrique Gómez Carrillo, *Antología de Enrique Gómez Carrillo* (Guatemala: Artemis Edinter, 2004).

¹⁶⁶ “El Culto de la Fuerza: Francia ha triunfado en el boxeo,” *El Imparcial*, 12 March 1911. Gómez Carrillo, born in Guatemala City in 1873, was the “most widely read [Latin American] chronicler of his day.” He was the official representative of several Latin American countries in various European capitals, published over eighty books and over three-thousand articles.

¹⁶⁷ AHDF, dozens of examples of advertisements from the period between 1900 and 1920 exist in the collections of the Historical Archive of Mexico City. As part of the process to gain permission to hold bouts (which were often denied) the petitioners had to furnish the advertisements that were posted to walls and lamp posts in the city. They also had to ask permission to advertise the bouts in certain places.

The implications of this controversial process are relatively unexplored in Mexican historiography.¹⁶⁸ The most studied and best understood focal points for the construction of national identity in this period were those that exploded across the Mexican psyche as a result of the power struggles among Revolutionary caudillos and their armies, but on the level of culture, important shifts were taking root that would transcend the tragic martial violence and imbed themselves in public sphere constructions of nation, masculinity, and identity for the duration of the twentieth century.¹⁶⁹

During the Porfiriato (1876-1910), Mexicans were exposed to images, accounts, and debates that compared Mexican civilization to the literature, behaviors and the tastes of European and American standards.¹⁷⁰ Amid the varying formulae for Mexican progress, the semi-nude male body in pursuit of athletic achievement was put forth as a paragon of modern masculinity.¹⁷¹ This celebration of physically demonstrative virility is a counterpoint to Robert

¹⁶⁸ Mexican boxing continues to be an important source of national pride and a daily presence on Mexican airwaves, newspapers, *revistas* and cinema. Especially when Mexican boxers fight in the United States, they are wrapped in the flag. There is only one fairly comprehensive popular overview of the history of boxing in Mexico that provides a wide array of visual images but only limited historical information. See: Marco A. Maldonado, *Pasión por los guantes: historia del box mexicano* (México: Clio, 2000). There are also several accounts of Mexican boxing by the journalist and former boxer Raúl Talán, which will be examined in-depth in Chapter Four.

¹⁶⁹ For the standard account of the Revolution see Alan Knight's monumental work: *The Mexican Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Also: John M. Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). For an account of how the Revolution was institutionalized for "official" nation building purposes by generations of Mexican historians and politicians see: Thomas Benjamin, *La Revolución: Mexico's Great Revolution As Memory, Myth & History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

¹⁷⁰ The Porfiriato began during the first presidential administration of General Porfirio Díaz in 1876 and ended with the advent of the Mexican Revolution in 1910. Elite attempts to administer the behavioral changes in the Mexican populace in order to imitate foreign ideas has received ample coverage from Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo and William Beezley, among others. See: Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) and William H. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987.)

¹⁷¹ Other Mexican symbols of masculinity that emerged from this period were imbedded in heroes of the Revolution like Emiliano Zapata, the Mexican peasant encircled in ammunition belts. See: Samuel Brunk, *The Posthumous Career of Emiliano Zapata: Myth, Memory, and Mexico's Twentieth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), p. 129. The rule of Porfirio Díaz spanned thirty four years and did a great deal to define modern Mexico. In this period, after the tumultuous years following independence, Mexico saw an enormous growth in foreign investment, construction of infrastructure and an increase in social stability that were the opposite of the instability

McKee Irwin's contention that Porfirian Era male gender norms valued the "civilized" and "feminized" male figure above earlier versions of "traditional" masculinity.¹⁷² This study questions McKee Irwin's contention that the end of the Porfirian Era marked a decisive shift in notions of masculinity from Victorian refinement to traditional *machismo*. Before the end of Porfiriato, Mexicans were beginning to appropriate modern athletics as a means of performing modernity and masculinity.¹⁷³ *El Imparcial*, for example, among the many newspapers that received government subsidies, was at the forefront in publishing risqué pictures of shirtless male athletes.¹⁷⁴

While Mexicans struggled on the battlefield for often disparate visions of how to move forward as a nation, novel ideas of how to live within that nation never ceased evolving. Even amid the chaotic violence of the *Decena Trágica* in Mexico City, Mexicans filled theaters and nascent athletic venues to watch locals compete with a wide array of transnational performers including African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Afro-Dutch, Japanese, and Turkish athletes.¹⁷⁵ Mexican youths like the "dashing" Carlos de la Tijera became the pupils of Afro-Mexican-American pugilists like "Kid Mitchell." Mitchell trained and managed de la Tijera, spending weeks at a time with the Mexican youth on "training haciendas" outside Mexico City to prepare him to meet the African-American Kid Lavigne in the ring.¹⁷⁶

and chaotic violence of the years preceding it. For a recent account of the Porfiriato see: Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo and Aurora Gómez Galvarriato, *El porfiriato* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006.)

¹⁷² Robert McKee Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp 116-117.

¹⁷³ On the even the Centennial, for example, The Mexican Athletic Club, in conjunction with the Club Atlético Internacional, was lauded for their pursuits which "reveal patriotism and the wish that Mexico, upon the glorious date that we are about to celebrate, figures with dignity among those countries of the world as a country with great affect for physical culture and all that is referred to as virile games." *El Diario*, 31 January 1910.

¹⁷⁴ Mraz, *Looking for Mexico*.

¹⁷⁵ *Cosmos*, 15 September 1913.

¹⁷⁶ Mitchell after Lavigne and Grace in the Same Ring," *MH*, 12 November 1907; "Prof. Galante Brilliant in his Fencing Work," *MH*, 8 December 1907.

Mexican intellectuals like José Juan Tablada sought to harness sport as a modernizing vehicle while simultaneously fearing unregulated violence. These cultural flows were digested and acted upon by a variety of civic social actors, from new clubs organized around athletics and body culture, to foreign nationals who became “professors” of physical culture. Some of these men were transients, like the Japanese Jiu-Jitsu instructor known as “Conde Koma,” while others like Jim Smith and American Jimmy Dundee would make their homes in Mexico City.¹⁷⁷ These men circulated within both the urban low culture of risqué theater and among the highest levels of elite society. Their instruction and performances drew the attention of such figures as Porfirio Díaz and Pancho Villa.¹⁷⁸

By 1910, most literate citizens of Mexico City would likely have been exposed to the voluminous press coverage of international dramas like the African-American Jack Johnson’s conquest of the heavyweight title from an enraged white America. Despite the legal prohibitions that prevented boxing from taking root as a daily phenomenon in the bullrings, theaters, and private clubs of the capital, any literate consumer of news in Mexico City aware of current events likely would have knowledge of the public uproar caused by prizefighting in the United States.¹⁷⁹ By the 1920s, Mexican entrepreneurs regularly imported international boxing

¹⁷⁷ The career of Conde Koma, who lived and worked among the elite in several Latin American countries, would make a fascinating study. There is only one Brazilian work that focuses on his life in that country: Stanlei Virgílio, *Conde Koma: o invencível yondan da história* (Campinas: Editora Átomo, 2002). Jim Smith, from the island of San Eustatius in the Dutch Caribbean, entered Mexico in 1906 and was still living there, working as a “Professor Gimnasia” in the 1940s. *Archivo General de la Nación* (hereafter AGN), *Registro de Extranjeros*, exp. 108811.

¹⁷⁸ As illustrated in the Introduction, Díaz vacillated between opposition to boxing as a potential stain on Mexican civilization, and the de facto recognition of the sport and physical culture in general as beneficial to elite Mexican youth, especially those who sought military careers. Pancho Villa, as will be shown later in the current chapter, sought to profit by holding the boxing match between the outlawed American boxer Jack Johnson and his “Great White Hope” opponent Jess Willard in 1915; keeping Johnson out of Mexico became a focus of Carranza’s campaign to prevent arms and money from Villa’s *División del Norte*.

¹⁷⁹ Coverage of international sport, especially the dramatic circumstances surrounding Jack Johnson and his legal, racial, and gendered battles against mainstream American morality were daily news in Mexico. Between 1905 and 1912, for example, the press brought details of Johnson’s problematic career to Mexican readers over 500 times.

celebrities, both Euro and Afro descended, like the American champion Jack Dempsey and Afro-Canadian Sam Langford. Dempsey appeared in staged bouts in front of thousands of spectators, and was sought after to advertise a range of products produced in Mexico.¹⁸⁰ The popular enactments of racial and nationalist dramas embedded in prizefighting served as a lens through which to view the United States and Europe and, increasingly, a means to gauge Mexican (and Latin American) attainment of modern cultural forms. This chapter examines how and why this cultural saturation that entailed the broadening of Mexican identities took shape, and how and why socially concerned Mexicans argued that the valorization and legalization of novel masculine pursuits such as boxing were necessary for the order and progress of the nation. As brothers Ireneo and Baldomero Romero would argue, there was no inconsistency in the legalization of prizefighting and the modernizing impulses emanating from the elite.¹⁸¹ The sport entailed both profits for entrepreneurs and positive lessons for Mexican youth. Though the terms in which these aspirations were expressed may seem hyperbolic to modern readers, the Romero brothers wrote in the common contemporary language of eugenics when they claimed that the legalization of prizefighting would contribute to the “ideal perfection of the race.”¹⁸²

These accounts appeared in such widely distributed newspapers as: *El Diario*, *El Dictamen*, *El País*, *The Mexican Herald*, *Nueva Era*, *El Imparcial* and others.

¹⁸⁰ AGN, *Fondo Enrique Díaz*, *Folio 56*. A series of photos in this collection are of Jack Dempsey in his tour of the “Radio” brand cigarette factory. The name of the brand, paired with the fact that Dempsey’s boxing match against the Argentine Luis Ángel Firpo in 1923 was one of the earliest (possibly the first) large-scale radio broadcast, suggests the association between modern technology, nascent Mexican manufacturing, and the celebrity of prizefighters like Dempsey. The Mexican cigarette industry was one of the most visible early manufacturing sectors. See: Jeffrey L. Bortz and Stephen Haber, *The Mexican Economy, 1870 - 1930: Essays on the Economic History of Institutions, Revolution, and Growth* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2002), and for a contemporary account in which the surveyor cites the existence of 242 cigarette and cigar factories in Mexico see *Dun’s International Trade Review*: R.G. Dun & Company, and Dun and Bradstreet, inc. *Dun’s Review* (New York: Dun and Bradstreet, 1908, Volume 11, p. 38.) By the 1920s, the cigarette company *El Buen Tono*, held a virtual monopoly on the market; out competing most other local factories.

¹⁸¹ AHDF, *Fondo Juegos Permitidos*, Tomo 14, Exp. 888.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

This chapter examines the transnational dynamics of Mexican engagement with pugilism from the late nineteenth century to 1910 in three sections. First, I trace elite debates on prizefighting at several points in the nineteenth century and the first publically attended boxing matches as they were envisioned at that time: between barbarity and progress. In the second section, I examine the modernist engagement with physical culture in the writings of the polyglot intellectual José Juan Tablada and other literary luminaries of the late Porfirian era and the rise of foreign and Mexican athletes as minor celebrities in the years before the Mexican Revolution. In the final section, I examine the pairing of physical culture with the ideas of positivist eugenics that posed the cultivated male body as a building block of progressive nationalism.

Cameos in the Culture: The Roots of Mexican Engagement with *Cultura Física* and *El Box* in the Nineteenth Century

Until the end of the nineteenth century, the visibility of the foreign practice of pugilism for Mexican readers was imbedded in press accounts of the exotic and barbaric in England and the United States. The nineteenth century press in Mexico largely focused on normative editorial writing through often rambling ruminations that sought to examine cultural practices through interpretations that nominally spoke in the name of public opinion.¹⁸³ As waves of European immigration saturated the United States, the seat of boxing transferred from England and Ireland to the Americas, where it flourished in the often illegal setting of barrooms and isolated rural areas, away from the control of the state, and thriving on the public sphere's fascination with violence, ethnic nationalism(s), and displays of masculinity.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³See: García, *El Imparcial* and Mraz, *Looking for Mexico*.

¹⁸⁴There are dozens of studies of boxing in the early twentieth century. Most center around well-known individuals who became some of the first sport celebrities such as John L. Sullivan (late nineteenth century) and the infamous African-American heavyweight champion Jack Johnson (champion from 1908-1915). For the best general history of

As early as 1806, Mexican writers cited pugilism and the culture surrounding it as both alien to local sensibilities and evidence of peculiar English barbarism.¹⁸⁵ These critiques, echoed throughout the nineteenth century, were often deployed to illustrate the risqué, “modern” (yet simultaneously barbarous), tastes of Americans and Europeans.¹⁸⁶ The symbolic discourses on pugilism, and the very use of the term “pugilato,” appeared increasingly throughout the nineteenth century. Commentaries on boxing were most often deployed as a defensive rhetorical trope that served as short-hand for disdainful characterizations of Anglo culture. It was a mechanism to counter American and European claims that Mexican and Hispanic traditions were low and atavistic due to the popularity of bullfighting and cockfighting.¹⁸⁷ The argument commonly ran that foreign observers were patently hypocritical: not only did they flock to

the rise of prizefighting in the United States see: Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010) other helpful works include Randy Roberts, *Papa Jack*; Roger Kahn, *A Flame of Pure Fire: Jack Dempsey and the Roaring '20s* (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc, 2000); Peter Benson, *Battling Siki: A Tale of Ring Fixes, Race, and Murder in the 1920s* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006).

¹⁸⁵ *Diario de México*, 10 March 1806; *Diario de México*; “Pugilato, Londres” 9 April 1810. This critique of English culture occurred during the reopening of shipping, bringing both more consumer goods and information to Spanish America from the outside world after the Peace of Amiens in 1802. It also corresponded with the rise of pugilism as a public diversion in England. See: Carlos Marichal, *Bankruptcy of Empire: Mexican Silver and the Wars between Spain, Britain, and France, 1760-1810* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and George L. Craik and Charles MacFarlane, *The Pictorial History of England During the Reign of George the Third: Being a History of the People, As Well As a History of the Kingdom. Illustrated with Several Hundred Woodcuts* (London: C. Knight, 1841).

¹⁸⁶ “Filadelfia,” *Gazeta [sic] de México*, 16 April 1852, 7 April 1825, 18 December 1825; “Estados Unidos: Ensayos del pugilato en el Senado,” *El Universal*, 25 November 1850. The diplomat and historian Manuel Larrainzar, equated British boxing with barbarism and Hispanic traditions of cockfighting and bullfighting as the “favorite pastimes of a certain part of society.” Manuel Larrainzar, *Estudios Sobre La Historia De América, Sus Ruiñas Y Antigüedades, Etc.* (México: Imprenta de M. Villanueva Francisconi y Hijos, 1875), pp. 230-231. One E. Harris and another and another fighter only identified as “A. Champion,” submitted a petition to the Cabildo for approval a public wrestling exhibition, stressing that no pugilism would be involved to increase the chances of acceptance. Mexico City and Ignacio Bejarano, *Actas de Cabildo del Ayuntamiento Constitucional de México* (México: Impr. del “Socialista”, 1884.) The Priest, Dr. Jaimie Balmes, a “cautious Republican,” defended the admittedly “barbarous practice” of bullfighting by contrasting it with boxing, which he called “Anglomania,” the pastime of the eminently civilized British. “Nueva Plaza de Toros,” *El Espectador de México* (México: Tipografía de Rafael y Villa, 1851), pp. 345-348. José Maria Tornel, the prominent political advisor to Antonio López de Santa Ana, similarly defended Mexican culture against what he perceived as the snobbish and hypocritical foreign critiques of the Spanish tradition of bullfighting, arguing that if Europeans had come as far as Mexicans had to control and discourage bullfighting, only then would they have a justifiable cultural critique. *El Museo mexicano, ó, Miscelanea pintoresca de amenidades curiosas é instructivas* (México: Ignacio Cumplido, 1841), pp. 247-248.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

bullfights when in Spain and Mexico, but they allowed bloody and disreputable contests between two humans.¹⁸⁸

Pantaleón Tovar, the liberal cosmopolitan intellectual and politician tried to diffuse this apology by arguing in favor of Mexican laws prohibiting bullfighting. Speaking in front of Congress in 1868, he held forth on both boxing and bullfighting as unequivocally barbarous and unworthy of a people who “march at the head of civilization.”¹⁸⁹ The central issue, Tovar stressed, was that though citizens of “cultured nations,” did attend prizefights, they were outlawed by their governments who acted according to the better judgment of the civilization as whole. The Mexican government, on the other hand, had long supported the barbarity of the bullring. To those who made this facile argument, Tovar stressed, “Imitating the relaxation and vice of national customs and not the refinement of their civilization would be to *retrograde* back to barbarity.”¹⁹⁰

The politician and writer Jesús F. López, writing in the 1880s, spoke for many Republican intellectuals who were concerned with the image of Mexico abroad. He argued that Mexico was not alone in allowing barbarous pastimes alongside the “toleration” of pugilism in civilized England, he departed from most apologies of bullfighting, echoing Tóvar by arguing “Mexico should imitate [foreign] peoples in the refinement of their civilization, not in the

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, 30 January 1868.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. Tovar was a Mexican nationalist who went into exile in Havana during the French occupation and later lived in New York where he witnessed American culture firsthand. He returned to Mexico after the victory of Juárez’s forces over the French installed Maximilian I (executed 1867), and wrote until his death in 1872. There has been surprisingly little work done on Tovar as a transnational intellectual, *costombrista*, and politician during the tumultuous Mexican nineteenth century. For a brief account of his career, See: Eladio Cortés, *Dictionary of Mexican Literature* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992).

relaxation of their social habits.”¹⁹¹ Mexicans, according to López, should discern for themselves between what clearly symbolized cultural advances and that which denoted atavistic and unrestrained tastes for blood sport.

While the quantity of public discourse on prizefighting (and foreign cultures in general) clearly increased in Mexico as the twentieth century approached, it is difficult to trace the growing popularity of the sport during the Porfiriato due to both its illegality and its early association with the little documented private lives of foreigners resident in Mexico City. In May of 1887, for instance, the police intervened to prevent a boxing match in the town of Huizachal (outside of Mexico City) between “two foreigners” that promised to draw a large crowd.¹⁹² The authorities reasoned that given the tradition of bullfighting, México was already saturated with barbarity and was not in need of more.¹⁹³ The proposed match had been planned for Mexico City, then was moved to the neighboring hamlet of Huizachal, a few miles west of the city limits, where it also met with police repression. Matches such as this were thus forced to go underground to escape the vigilance of the police or carefully staged in private, members only clubs. Satirizing the event, the liberal oppositionist writer *Juvenal* (Enrique Chávarri) facetiously praised the “humane, poetic, sensible, and romantic” police for stopping the match. They did so, Juvenal opined, while still allowing even children to take part in bullfights.¹⁹⁴

Francisco González echoed Juvenal, pairing the fascination with boxing and other “barbarous

¹⁹¹ Jesús F. López, *Pot pourri. Colección de artículos literarios y humorísticos; morales, filosóficos, críticos, biográficos, discursos, peroraciones, viajes, costumbres, revistas, novelas, dramas, comedias, soliloquios teatrales* (Aguascalientes: Imprenta de El Aguila, 1897).

¹⁹² “Charla de Domingos,” Juvenal, *El Monitor Republicano*, 29 May 1887. Enrique Chávarri was a leader of the liberal press that opposed the regime of Porfirio Díaz. He was brought up on charges of libel on more than one occasion by the government. A contemporary observer cited Chávarri’s articles as “the most widely read of any in Mexico.” Adolfo Duclós Salinas, *The Riches of Mexico and Its Institutions* (St. Louis: Nixon-Jones Printing, 1893), p. 423; Lucio Cabrera Acevedo, *La Suprema Corte de Justicia durante el fortalecimiento del Porfiriato, 1882-1888* (México, D.F.: Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación, 1991).

¹⁹³ Enrique de Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña histórica del teatro en México* (Segunda Edición), (México: La Europea, 1895), p. 32.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. “Charla de Domingos.”

spectacles” that were “invading all of [their] social classes” with the general cultural decadence that gave rise to such mass diversions.¹⁹⁵ The lifestyle that surrounded pugilism also contributed to what González identified as “clandestine prostitution,” or sex out of wedlock, which “steals peace from honorable families,” takes the most “precious jewel” from women, “robs men of their virility” and is the greatest “cancer” on Mexican society.¹⁹⁶

La Voz de México, a conservative daily, seconded González and Chávarria against the Mexican appropriation of prizefighting. In addition to being “barbaric,” “homicidal,” “bestial,” and “grotesque,” the Anglo diversion, while suited to their “robust” bodies, would injure physically fragile Mexicans who on the whole had “no robustness.”¹⁹⁷ Tropical climates, the author posited, were not suited to this type of sport. It was inconceivable that the Mexico City government would permit such a spectacle to take place. Underground boxing matches and the stealth with which they were organized and carried out amazed one columnist writing for *El Monitor* in June of 1892.¹⁹⁸ The popularity of this new “genre of diversion” was growing despite its “repugnance.” Even though there were few public announcements and no street corner criers to advertise these spectacles to the public, the seats in the *Teatro de Invierno* were filled, mostly with members of the “*Colonia norte-americana*.” The promoters of the match had asked the *Ayuntamiento* (City Government) for permission to hold the bout but were refused. They staged the match anyway, in the *Invierno*, which was a venue of last resort and known as a low class, “wretched” place that catered to “proletarian” clientele. The small, wooden theater was located

¹⁹⁵Francisco González, “Boletín del Monitor.” *El Monitor Republicano*, 31 May 1887.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *La Voz de México*, 12 June 1892

¹⁹⁸ Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña histórica del teatro en México*.

on Calle San Juan de Díos, bordering the upper class Alameda, and was also known for its risqué puppet shows and other guilty pleasures.¹⁹⁹

Combative sport in the media became a focal point for editorials that debated the meritorious and/or decadent aspects of these new practices transposed onto Mexican national territory. In 1892, the *Daily Anglo-American*, published in Mexico City, showed that the still relatively small contingent of American and British expatriates in the capital were aware that Mexicans viewed these sports as barbaric and atavistic.²⁰⁰ The newspaper quoted an unnamed Mexican daily in which it was ironically stated that “with wrestling matches and probable boxing matches and bull-fights, the country is surely becoming more civilized.”²⁰¹

Despite what approached a uniform editorial disdain for pugilism in the Mexican press throughout the nineteenth century, boxing was permitted among the elite in venues that were under their control. On December 1, 1894, a Saturday night, President Díaz, along with his Secretary of Government Manuel Romero Rubio, attended an athletic exhibition at the YMCA on San Juan Letrán Street.²⁰² Both politicians, as was “well known,” were proponents of what they were termed “exercises of muscular force.” The exhibition was organized by G.P. Gaston, the American director of the association who was one of the foremost proponents of the YMCA

¹⁹⁹ The Invierno was cited by one observer as an unhealthy place where “bad airs” circulated that sickened the audience. Ibid, p. 248.; Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera and Elvira López Aparicio, *Crónicas y artículos sobre teatro IV: 1885-1889* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1985), p. 437. Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera *Obras* (México: Centro de Estudios Literarios, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1959), p. 445.

²⁰⁰ *Daily Anglo-American*, 16 June 1892. See William Schell, Jr. for an account of the small yet growing “American Colony” in Mexico City: William Schell, Jr., *Integral Outsiders: The American Colony in Mexico City, 1876 - 1911* (Wilmington, Del: SR Books, 2001).

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Half of the members of the YMCA in Mexico City in 1894 were Mexicans, and the gymnasium and reading rooms were visited by over 18,000 people in the course of that year. National Council of the Young Men's Christian Associations of the United States of America. *YMCA Year Book and Official Rosters* (New York: National Councils of the Young Men's Christian Associations of Canada and the United States of America, 1900) . Rubio was likely Díaz's conduit for attending exhibitions of this nature. Since at least 1892, Rubio had attended several such exhibitions of “sport.” Enrique Santibáñez, *México; revista de sociedad, arte y letras* (México: Imprenta de "El Nacional," 1892), 6 October 1892. San Juan Letrán was two blocks from the zócalo.

movement in Latin America.²⁰³ The atmosphere surrounding the event was markedly cosmopolitan and the decoration purposefully eclectic. In addition to garlands and Japanese parasols, the gymnasium was decorated with French and British flags while the Mexican and American colors were displayed interlaced as “proof of the confraternity that exists” between México and the United States. An audience of the “best families,” both Mexican and American, were presided over by the President of the Republic on a raised platform.²⁰⁴

After several feats of gymnastics on the parallel and fixed bars, President Díaz gave his personal approval for a boxing match between the instructors Emilio Lobato and Ángel Escudero.²⁰⁵ This last exhibition of the evening was greeted by applause from the crowd. Elite families in the presence of the President did not constitute a risk to national morals or an increase in public barbarism as feared by Díaz on other occasions. The authorities likely lost little sleep over the debut of boxing in the highest levels of civil society as combative sports entered into even the realm of the most exclusive retreats such as the exclusive Lakeside Club.²⁰⁶ By the end of the century, the most prestigious preparatory school in the nation, the *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria*, proudly advertised that it offered its students classes in boxing and military

²⁰³ Ibid. The YMCA, by the late nineteenth century, was a global organization that sought to expand the ideas of “muscular Christianity” that were prevalent in Protestant American thinking in this era. See: Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880 – 1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); and Richard M. Gamble, *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation* (Wilmington, Del: ISI Books, 2003).

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Lobato and Escudero were put forth as two superb physical specimens of Mexican development and were included in an 1893 study by the eminent Mexican biologist Alfonso L. Herrera, funded the Smithsonian and translated into French, of the effects of environment on the development of physique and respiration. Alfonso Luis Herrera and Daniel Vergara-Lope Escobar, *La vie sur les hauts plateaux. Influence de la pression barométrique sur la constitution et le développement des êtres organisés. Traitement climatérique de la tuberculose* (México: Imprimerie de I. Escalante, 1899).

²⁰⁶ *El Partido Liberal*, 4 December 1894, p. 3.; *El Mundo*, 9 December 1894, p.12.

exercises, giving “the greatest guarantee [of success]” for fathers who considered enrolling their children.²⁰⁷

The pugilistic exhibitions at the YMCA and the inclusion of boxing in the curriculum of the most expensive preparatory schools represented elite Mexicans’ embrace of novel ideas about the body, physicality, and its relation to exhibitions of national virility and Mexican aspirations toward the material and behavioral trappings of modernity. One of the boxers who took part in the boxing exhibition approved by Díaz was Emilio Lobato, a proponent of physical culture who was used to performing in front of large audiences and who pushed new ideas in the imagining of the Mexican body and its development for the good of the Mexican “race.”

Porfirio Díaz endorsed the ideas of Lobato by allowing him both to stage otherwise prohibited pugilistic exercises for select audiences and to play an integral role in the preparation and indoctrination of the *juventud dorada*.²⁰⁸ Lobato was an astute political operator, and was one of the founding members of the strategically named “Porfirio Díaz Central Circle of Mexican Gymnastics” in 1890.²⁰⁹ This private aristocratic “circle” was dedicated to “modern teaching” of body culture and depended on the patronage of Díaz and his *científicos*. Lobato would later be assigned the post of Professor of Gymnastics at the prestigious *Colegio Militar* located at the seat of national power on the grounds of the Presidential Palace in Chapultepec Park.²¹⁰ Professor Lobato wrote about the “modern science” of gymnastics in Lombrosian and positivist terms and argued that the new practices of physical culture were fundamentally

²⁰⁷ *El Tiempo*, 17 January 1910.

²⁰⁸ J. Figueroa Domenech, *Guía general descriptiva de la República Mexicana; historia, geografía, estadística, etc., etc., con triple directorio del comercio y la industria, autoridades, oficinas públicas, abogados, médicos, hacendados, correos, telégrafos y ferrocarriles, etc.* (México: R. de Araluce, 1899), p. 622.

²⁰⁹ “Circulo de Gimnástica Mexicana,” *El Monitor Republicano*, 19 April 1890; Lobato also gave speeches on physical education and Mexican youth to Mexican Society of Pedagogic Studies.

²¹⁰ José María Álvarez, *Añoranzas; el México que fue, mi Colegio Militar* (México: Imprenta Ocampo, 1949), p.7.

important to the “regeneration and enhancement of our [Mexican] race,” and that the acceptance of these modern norms of behavior would be a boon to the “the individual, the family, and the state.”²¹¹

In the early 1890s, Lobato argued that competitive sport was counterproductive in the forging of the new Mexican man because it focused asymmetrically on the development of just a few bodily movements to the detriment of the body as a whole. The new generation being formed by the novel ideas implanted by the *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria*, and the *Colegio Militar*, those predestined to continue the Porfirian project, would perform physical culture in well ordered classes where they would chant in unison the mantras, “moral and military,” that “grew the soul of man” and propelled him toward the realization of paramount virtues like heroism, charity, and philanthropy. A novel focus on the integral systems of the body would also complete the moral and intellectual education of Mexico’s future leaders, turning them into “mature fruits of virility.”²¹² Creating harmonious and self controlled bodies was not only beneficial for the country and its future leaders, it was an important aspect of the modernizing project. It was another step toward bringing Mexico into line with the most forward thinking countries. Lobato reasoned that: “We are in an epoch of transition between the routine, ancient principles [of bodily development] and modern, clear and irresistible dogmas. In México, pedagogical science is evolving actively to acquire the forms that are presented in the most advanced countries.”²¹³

²¹¹ Ernesto Lobato. “Gimnástica” in: *Conferencias científicas de los alumnos de la Escuela Nacional Preparatoria* (México: Imprenta de “La Voz de Oriente”, 1891). For an overview of the impact of Lombrosian and Spencerian ideas of positive eugenics in Latin America see Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 191.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

For Lobato, the scientific training of masculine bodies would relieve a number of defects that leached the vitality of the Mexican national body: "...it will notably reduce the number of rachitic and sickly individuals (*raquíticos y enfermos*) and also the number of the insane and idiots (*locos e idiotas*).” The excessive urbanization that “subjugated” the brain was to be moderated by physical exercise, yielding “grace and beauty to the two sexes, making them strong, at the same time, against all classes of struggle and privations that often the human race suffers.”²¹⁴ Lobato’s influence on the teaching of body culture to an entire generation of Mexicans cannot be overstated. Even after the beginning of the Revolution, he continued to instruct educators from around Mexico on the teaching of physical culture in primary and secondary schools.²¹⁵

As the above anecdotes suggest, highly placed Porfirians sought to control the pace of dissemination of this imported culture. Much like legal prohibitions on where and when Mexican cyclists were permitted to ride their imported bicycles, the Porfirian elite sought to prohibit the diffusion of pugilism in all but the most controlled and officially endorsed environments.²¹⁶ For a boxing match to be entirely legal, the direct permission of the President was often necessary; those pugilistic spectacles that took place beyond the reach and permission of the law on the outskirts of Mexico City prompted the public sphere to react indignantly to these “attacks on civilization.” The Porfirian elite, however, at times acted against the General’s wishes. Lobato, though early in the 1890s he argued against competitive sport, could not resist the temptation to put his theories about corporeal development into action: he became the trainer for the *negro americano*, the professional boxer and wrestler Billy Clark, in

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 193.

²¹⁵ Mexico. Secretaría de instrucción pública, *Boletín de instrucción pública* (Vol. 19, Iss. 4[1912].)

²¹⁶ Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club*.

1895.²¹⁷ Clark had begun to advertise his services as a boxing professor in *The Mexican Sportsman*, perhaps the first serial publication dedicated to modern sport in Mexico. He gave lessons starting in 1895 from his Olympic Club of Mexico, located one block from the zócalo on Calle de la Palma. Advertising “scientific exhibitions” (no money would change hands), Clark was able to avoid having to arrange for permits with the local *Ayuntamiento*. More than an attempt to gain clients for his gym, Clark was testing the waters for the potential for staging prizefights in Mexico.²¹⁸

Later in 1895, while American promoters searched for a remote place on the Mexican-American border to hold an illegal boxing match for the world heavyweight championship, two boxers shocked the Mexican public by holding a prizefight fifty miles north of Mexico City.²¹⁹ Though Díaz had dispatched troops to prevent the Maher-Fitzsimmons bout from crossing the Río Bravo (Grande), another bout, interracial and “barbaric,” took place less than a two-hour train ride from the metropolis. The enraged reactions in the Mexican press illustrated the public sphere’s rejection of the barbaric imposition of foreign pastimes organized outside of official (governmental) channels.

James F. “Jimmy” Carroll, the Irish former light-heavyweight champion of the world, opened a second boxing academy in Mexico City in early 1895 and operated the saloon in the famous Hotel Iturbide.²²⁰ Carroll was an internationally known boxer and promoter and had established himself in Mexico in an effort to extend the lucrative trade that had flourished along

²¹⁷ “The Gloved Contest,” *MH*, 23 November 1895.

²¹⁸ *The Mexican Sportsman*, 12 September 1895; 19 September 1895; 26 September 1895. The early Mexican boxer Policarpo Santa Maria remembered following Billy Clark on the streets of Mexico City as a child. Clark ate regularly at the lunch counter run by Santa Maria’s mother and encouraged the young man to box. Talán, *Y...Fueron Idolos!*

²¹⁹ See the Introduction for an account of this match.

²²⁰ Beezeley, *Judas at the Jockey Club*.

the Mexican-American border but which had become increasingly difficult due to the crusade of Governor Culberson (TX) against prizefighting. Carroll sought to legalize boxing in Mexico by appealing directly to the patriotic and “virile” sentiments of the government.²²¹ In early 1895, he petitioned the Mexico City *Ayuntamiento* to grant permission for boxing exhibitions at any theater in the city.²²² As the manager of the National Athletic Club (“The only place to attain health and strength in Mexico” and a competitor for the African American Billy Clark), he promised to introduce the Mexican public to “this essentially manly, useful and hygienic class of exercises that contribute to muscular development.”²²³ Likely knowing that the odds were against him, he offered the members of the city government a private showing to convince them of the civilized benefits of his “science.” His attempts to overturn these prohibitions, and to hold a “scientific” exhibition, were followed attentively in the conservative press.²²⁴ Failing to gain the blessing of the *Ayuntamiento* on the merits of pugilism (and the taxes to be paid on gate receipts) Carroll ventured to the state of Hidalgo, north of Mexico City, where he found the Governor of Pachuca, General Rafael Craviota, willing to grant the concession. Likely induced by both tax revenue for the fight and hoping to satiate the large foreign mining interests in Pachuca, Craviota also insisted that the bout would teach Mexicans how to settle disputes in a civilized manner, without the use of weapons.²²⁵

²²¹ Jimmy Carroll was variously known as Brooklyn Jimmy Carroll and Irish Jimmy Carroll, he was one of the most successful early examples of a former athlete and prizefighter becoming even more successful out of the ring as a fight manager and fixer. Kelly Richard Nicholson, *Hitters, Dancers and Ring Magicians: Seven Boxers of the Golden Age* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2010); Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club*; Armond Fields, *James J. Corbett: A Biography of the Heavyweight Boxing Champion and Popular Theater Headliner* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co, 2001).

²²² AHDF, *Diversiones Públicas*, Tomo 804, Numero 840.

²²³ Ibid. AHDF; *MH*, 28 January 1896. Beezley incorrectly cites Carroll as the owner of the Club. It was actually owned and funded by the British engineer and railroad developer A.J. Campbell, who hired Carroll to teach boxing. *MH*, 3 January 1896; *The Statist: A Journal of Practical Finance and Trade* (London: Published at "The Statist,") Vol. 21, 1888.

²²⁴ *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, 31 November 1895. “Sparring Exhibition,” *MH*, 9 October 1895.

²²⁵ *El Globo*, 4 December 1895. Also see, Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club*, p. 32.

On the morning of November 25, 1895, an express train of the Hidalgo Railroad left Mexico City with six special wagons that carried hundreds of spectators from Mexico City to the bullring in Pachuca to attend the boxing match between Billy Clark (the “Colored Champion of Central America”) and the white Englishman Billy Smith (“Champion of Texas”).²²⁶ For two months, the boxing promoter, Irish Jimmy Carroll, had assured the public they would be able to see a clean and scientific match in Mexico and it appeared he was finally making good on his promise.²²⁷

“Reporters” (the English term used to denote a novel type of journalistic coverage) for all the major Mexico City dailies, *El Nacional*, *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, *El Partido Liberal*, *El Noticioso*, *El Universal*, *El Mundo Ilustrado*, *El Globo*, and *La Voz de México*, and *El Montior Republicano*, scrambled to attend the bout in Pachuca.²²⁸ One observer writing for the modernist magazine *El Mundo Ilustrado* was both captivated and astonished by the atmosphere of excitement on the train en route to the match. He waxed philosophical about the changing nature of such individual combats throughout history. Boxing was novel, but it was the descendent of medieval tournaments, duels, and even of “patriotic warfare.” However it shared none of the virtues of these pursuits. It sought the sum of two or three thousand pesos instead of the exaltation of honor, the saints, family, or country.²²⁹ Despite these detractions, the crowd on board clamored to shake the hands of the fighters. The atmosphere on the train was filled with

²²⁶*MH*, 24 November 1894; Enrique de Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña histórica del teatro en México* (México: Imprenta “La Europea”, 1895), pp. 605-606.

²²⁷ *MH*, 9 October 1895, 25 October 1895; *La Voz de México*, 19 November 1895.

²²⁸ The self-application of the title “Reporter,” by the younger generation of Mexican journalists during this period ranked the established journalistic polemicists who looked upon the advent of more modern journalistic techniques as lower class and indicative of Americanization. *El Partido Liberal* quipped: “The reporter [sic] is a pernicious foreigner, and the name itself embodies the foreignness of this individual. The dictionary does not recognize the word, because the reporter knows nothing of grammar. But the reporter, which in Spanish means ‘busybody,’ has entered by the right of conquest to the language, journalism, and social life. And he is almost the king of the press. It is the Yankee who brings in money for the editors.” quoted in Mraz, *Looking for Mexico*.

²²⁹ *El Mundo*, 1 December 1895.

neologisms to describe rules, regulations and “academic” boxing. The extraordinary levels of enthusiasm and the drama anticipated for such a bloody and barbaric spectacle both disturbed and intrigued the observers.²³⁰

The columnist was also alarmed by what he understood as an unhealthy decline in the quality of legitimate public entertainments. The resulting invigoration of the lower classes that this type of match encouraged resulted in periodic chaos. Conversely, among the preferable, traditional, and more “noble” pursuits of comedy, music, work and science there was little chance of encountering what the author deemed the “sensations of the epoch: drinking much, and yelling even more with eyes injected with drunkenness and violence, attending the agony of a man between the bull’s horns or under the knees of a fellow rational being; all this being a bit less barbarous than the public that applauds its triumph.”²³¹ Clearly, the drunken, barbarized masses freely imbibing of ritualized violence should be feared, that fear should lead to regulation and punishment.²³²

At stake here was more than perceived erosion in the standards of public entertainments. Though the columnist argued that bullfighters had always been celebrated as the glory of “the race,” the current celebrity was shameful: bullfights had become excuses to drink, yell and cause public scandals. More damning than the manner in which violence and barbarity were performed was the threat of chaos emanating from the spectators, the *populacho*. In a broader sense, the author was reacting to what he feared to be a shift in what historians might now call the “cultural consensus” within the elite; he bemoaned generational changes in entertainment preferences that indicated an alarming symptom of cultural decadence and Americanization.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid, *El Mundo Ilustrado*.

Pugilism, much more than baseball or other foreign athletic imports, retained a hint of “tawdriness,” danger, and an association with what one author has called “underworld flavor.”²³³ As Gramsci would argue decades later, this type of tension was indicative of a historical moment when “the old intellectual and moral leaders of society” fear the erosion of the culture that they have sanctioned and propagated and out of fear “loudly proclaim the death of all civilization, all culture, all morality.”²³⁴

As the match in Pachuca transpired, Mexican observers were horrified at the beating *el negro Clarke* [sic] received that left him unconscious and bloody on the sand of the bullring. While the Englishman was carried off on the shoulders of several intoxicated fans, Clark was transported to the infirmary where he regained consciousness enough to speak after a half hour.²³⁵ After the bout, the defeated African-American boxer visited the offices of several Mexico City newspapers where he alleged that Smith had imbibed illegal substances that gave him an edge in the contest and that his “seconds” had intervened in his favor. A rumor later circulated on the streets that Clark had accused Smith to his face and that both men then drew pistols in public, having to be separated by those around them.²³⁶ These “scandals” contributed to the outrage in the Mexican press.²³⁷

Porfirio Díaz, angered that the Mayor of Pachuca, Trinidad Vázquez, and the Governor, General Cravioto, had not intervened to prohibit the spectacle, wrote a letter in which he berated

²³³ Gorn, p. 222.

²³⁴ Cited in Kate Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture, and Anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 84.

²³⁵ *Ibid.* Little is known about Billy Clark’s origin, but it was often stated that he was an African-American. He was a precursor the next generation of journeymen African-American athletes who plied their trade in Mexico. Clark was unfortunate in his attempts to foment Mexican engagement with prizefighting and had to turn to other sensational (yet paradoxically *not* prohibited) exhibitions such as wrestling bulls and bears.

²³⁶ “Los pugilistas quieren balazos,” *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, 29 November 1895.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

them for allowing such “a spectacle that signifies a great attack on civilization.”²³⁸ Editorialists for *El Globo* and *La Voz de México* lauded this action by the President (the private letter had been leaked to the press), stressing that “we celebrate the clear and energetic attitude with which the Executive of the Union is against the unsuitable spectacle of pugilism these days in a country that calls itself civilized.”²³⁹

Under the title “This Week’s Savagery,” *El Mundo* ironically shamed the public with a description of what the editorialist deemed to be the combination of Mexican national vices with imported barbaric behavior. While it had taken decades and even centuries for Mexicans to discover basic hygiene and the use of an oven instead of an open fire in the kitchen, Mexicans still clamored to see “the pornographic exhibitions of Lilly Clay, and the imbecilic fight of rational versus irrational beings, and of two human entities [fighting each other] in the bullring.”²⁴⁰ The shocked writer continued: “it seems incredible that in a civilized country such repugnant spectacles are permitted.”²⁴¹ The author berated his readers for holding ideological double standards. While they fulminated against the practice of lynching “*aplicada a los negros*,” cried out against the savage practices of “errant tribes,” or of whipping petty thieves (*rateros*), they applauded when a bull disemboweled a man, or when “a *macho* of our species smashes the skull of another of us in the a bullring.”²⁴² *La Voz de México* seconded the judgment that this inability of the Mexican public to discern what these “entertainments” really

²³⁸ *El Globo*, 4 December 1895.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*. This episode is also recounted in, José C. Valadés, *El porfirismo: historia de un régimen* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1987), and Juan Felipe Leal, Carlos Arturo Flores Villela, and Eduardo Barraza, *Anales del cine en México, 1895-1911* (México: Voyeur, 2007). Though there is no evidence of this, it is likely that Mayor Trinidad Vázquez bowed to pressure from the enormous foreign capital interests that dominated the economy of the “mining camp” of Pachuca. British, American, and French investment in the mining industry accounted for the lion’s share of economic activity in the region.

²⁴⁰ *El Mundo*, 1 December 1895., Lilly Clay was a British-born American burlesque actress who toured Mexico in the early 1890s. Her shows caused scandals virtually everywhere she played in México. M.J. O’Neill, *How He Does It: Sam T Jack, Twenty Years a King in the Realm of Burlesque* (Chicago: M.J. O’Neill, 1895).

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² *Ibid.*, *El Mundo*, 1 December 1895.

were was indicative of a larger “decadence” of Mexican culture. What was truly at stake here was the future of the nation as a civilized and progressive modern country and according to the author the press bore some responsibility for the base practices then thriving in México:

Now people talk about decadence in literature; what we should be talking about is decadence in our customs. Let’s present to our readers an energetic and virile people that protects the weak, that assists in useful works, that feels calm and pure love; that frequents the countryside, the opera, concerts, and you will see how the chronicles, today frivolous and adulating of the newspapers, will not talk about these scandalous matters; but only of palpitating forces, of enthusiasm for the struggle for life, of combat with the elements of nature and not against brothers; of industrial and mercantile contests and not for those wandering women who go in search for customers; of the learned who win prizes and not of geniuses who go to prison; of women who give sons to the *patria* and not of shameless ones that dishonor it, of scientific inventions and not of robberies, of heroic acts and not of vile murders, of applause for intelligence and not of ovations for brute force.²⁴³

This polemic is indicative of the public sphere reaction of the late-Porfirian press when encountering both rapid urbanization and the concomitant democratization of public spaces and entertainments that they considered barbaric and destabilizing. The pageantry of a boxing exhibition in front of the President was one thing, but the drunken masses’ celebration of violence was not to be tolerated in a progressive nation.²⁴⁴ Those who encouraged such disreputable shows by their attendance are not only to be shamed on an individual level within their classes, but should be paired with those members of the lower classes whose lack of refinement their behaviors and tastes resembled: they showed their qualitative lack of class by

²⁴³ Ibid, *El Mundo*, 1 December 1895.

²⁴⁴ On the challenges of urbanization in Mexico City, see: Picatto, *City of Suspects*; Jonathan Kandell, *La Capital: The Biography of Mexico City* (New York: Random House, 1988); Diane E. Davis, *Urban Leviathan: Mexico City in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Steve Cory and Ray Webb, *Daily Life in Ancient and Modern Mexico City* (Minneapolis: Runestone Press, 1999). For an informative take on population growth and the division of Mexico City into East and West/ Slum and Suburb see: Michael Johns, *The City of Mexico in the Age of Díaz* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997). For both the increasing population as a whole and the growing number of Americans at the end of the Porfiriato see: William Schell, Jr., *Integral Outsiders: The American Colony in México City, 1876-1911* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2001).

their attendance. These disturbing trends, the author argued, were impelled by irresponsible newspaper coverage which lauded an “apotheosis” of brute force over the refined intellect.²⁴⁵

Mexicans, the columnist continued, already enjoyed cockfighting, bullfighting, and duels: the characteristic activities of what the author called “*nuestra raza*.” To these cultural markers were added baseball, horseracing and other pursuits from the “saxon race,” but Mexican men were lacking in knowledge of pugilism, and yet they still blindly “craved” it. The recent public disorders (near riots) in the bullrings worried many, convincing those who controlled public discourse that the popular masses were too “full of themselves.” The increasing incidence of public disorder and violence, columnists argued, would lead to the end of bullfighting and the “exaltation to the throne of popular admiration of ‘*box americano*.’” The writer insinuated that modern sport was better organized and less chaotic than its more traditional, and more “Mexican” counterpart. But, the writer stressed, “It was not possible, in only one country, to unite all of the entertainments of the globe. Our *civilización sportica* is not up to it, pardon the neologism.”²⁴⁶ The author, clearly enraged, corrected himself, adding a hint of irony. He explained that when commenting on an interracial bout, mentioning a black *before* a white would be a crime according to the “perverted yankee civilization.” He ended by a further broadside against those who attended the match in Pachuca: “Neither the sacrifice of the martyrs and the combats of the slaves for the ancients; nor the tournaments of the middle ages, nor duels, nor anything, can be comparable to this diversion, according to the elegant youths of today.” In tandem with a generational shift that entailed a growing affinity for novel physical culture; a reaction was peaking against affinities for imported leisure, fast living, and a taste for danger among the *juventud dorada* of México. This reaction evoked a definition of Mexican identity as

²⁴⁵ Ibid., *El Mundo*, 1 December 1895.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

caught between a barbaric and backward past (and present) and a barbaric and modern future. Scant progress took place in the realm of culture and the youth only traded the backward behaviors of the past for more modern forms of barbarity.

It causes us shame to have to admit that we are civilized. We contradict this when in the middle of the day amid a crowd drunk with savage emotions, two men—better yet two beasts—degenerated by their idiocy, two cretins that have no worldliness other than the purely physical and their herculean claws, go forth in the middle of a circus and there, almost naked, trade blows that swell the face, redden their jaws and threaten to destroy, annihilate and turn to ashes those muscles weakened by the fight and most times covered in the blood that flows from their wounds.²⁴⁷

The indignant writer stresses that such spectacles in Mexico were particularly dangerous for public morals because the mass of Mexicans had not reached that cultural level enjoyed by Europeans and were apt to lose even “common sense,” in the face of such pagan pursuits that mirrored the gladiatorial combat of ancient Rome.²⁴⁸ Even more regrettable was that the authorities permitted and even encouraged such disorderly displays. More than simple entertainment, the net result of such public savagery was that the standards of Mexican culture lay “in the sand” alongside the fallen boxer and the public enthusiasm was proof of Mexican inhumanity. The writer calls upon the federal government to censure the state governor of Hidalgo, to imitate the civilized thinkers in the United States, and to avoid shame before cultured Europeans that such spectacles were sure to bring.²⁴⁹

Other Porfirian intellectuals commented on the public uproar caused by the Billy Clark/Billy Smith match. On December 16, 1895, two weeks after the bout, Federico Gamboa, an early Mexican modernist writer, entered in his diary thoughts on the boxing match in Pachuca:

²⁴⁷ “Progresamos: hacia el salvajismo (We are progressing toward savagery)” article from *El Tiempo*, quoted in *La Voz de México*, 29 November 1895.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

—After having attended—what a shame!—the pugilistic fight which, twenty days ago reached a horrible end—between a yankee negro, Billy Clark, and a white Irishman, Billy Smith, I went tonight to the *Club Atlético de México*, where the very same Billy Clark gives practice lessons on boxing. It's a ferocious thing, this science of the fists, and learning it demands that they slap you in the face! I'll probably never learn it.²⁵⁰

Gamboa, a diplomat and professor, also wrote some of the earliest Mexican pulp fiction. His gritty novels presented the underside of Mexican urban life and his subject matter included drunkenness, prostitution, marital infidelity, disease and urban decay.²⁵¹ Despite and perhaps because of his broad and cosmopolitan experience, he did not hide a personal aversion to this particular foreign cultural product.²⁵² Gamboa had traveled widely as both a private citizen and Mexican diplomat and was conversant in modern trends and ideas about physical culture and the body but was repulsed by boxing on a visceral, personal level.

Echoing Gamboa, Ireneo Paz, novelist, journalist, politician and grandfather of Octávio Paz, editorialized on the front page of his newspaper *La Patria* against the barbarism and social disruptions created both by pugilism and more traditional Mexican popular pastimes.²⁵³ As many social commentators before him, he denigrated the novel and foreign while placing it within a context of customary Mexican social practices whose traditional attributes were

²⁵⁰ Federico Gamboa, *Mi diario* (México and Guadalajara: Imprenta de "La Gaceta de Guadalajara," 1906), p. 258.

²⁵¹ On Gamboa see John Charles Chasteen's commentary on Gamboa's most famous work of fiction: Federico Gamboa and John Charles Chasteen, *Santa: A Novel of Mexico City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

²⁵² As will be shown in Chapter Four, Gamboa was later (1920s) a member of the government institution charged with censoring public entertainment. He continued his campaign against the more marginal aspects of boxing.

²⁵³ Ireneo Paz was, during this period, the consummate Porfirian liberal. His journalistic career had begun during *La Reforma* and he had later sided with Díaz against Juárez. He had served time in prison for his writings, had witnessed intense periods of political chaos, and was deeply troubled by the new fashion for slightly regulated violence capitalized upon as a popular diversion. His reaction to the importation of pugilism, as he explained, was the result of a fear of disorder and a suspicion of what he viewed as the baser aspects of human nature exploited and encouraged by lax public morals and penchant for what others regarded as "strong sensations." A lifelong liberal positivist, when it came to public morals he reproduced the stock argument that only patient education and conscious attention to progress could change deeply rooted traditions. See: Frederick Starr, *Readings from Mexican Authors* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1904), pp. 301-304.

vulgarized by their modern usages; barbarous cultural atavism was a disgrace to a modernizing nation:

...a bull rolling around in his blood, wounded by a matador's rapier and a horse dragging its intestines through the sand, like a cock with its jugular cut by a spur. The same we'll say about pugilism. Two men of crude appearance, in whose countenance there is not even a hint of intelligence, punch each other for two hours—blows capable of demolishing a bull, fall in turn to the ground, covered in blood, face inflamed, eyes bursting with the blows they have suffered, with a broken rib, and both retire to spend long days in bed, before finding themselves well enough to go back out onto the street to receive the ovations that are offered them in the taverns.²⁵⁴

Another editorialist who had been present at the Clark/Smith fight, further reacted to the importation of prizefight films from the United States into Mexico. This piece is worth as lengthy quotation, as it is exemplary of the debates, on the level of civilization, between perceptions of barbarism and cultural tastes that exploded around the seemingly isolated prizefight:

All of the Anglo Saxon race is impassioned by and adept at sport and boxing; and one can measure the distance between two races comparing their favorite diversions. Bull fighting is elegant, aesthetic, and focuses on the almost intangible movement of the bullfighter, like a dance. Boxing is no more than a hammer and an anvil. It is devoid of aesthetics. The movements of the boxers are inelegant, course, like a "*tango de negros*." Boxing is barbarous and savage yet insipid and monotonous. In bullfighting, man fights against savagery [*fiera*], Latins have not conquered nature (as the Anglo Saxons have) and they struggle against it still; in pugilism the Anglo Saxon struggles with man and tries in the arena, like in politics, to dominate and subjugate man. In the bullfight, each fighter helps, assists, he protects the rest, and *el quite* [a movement of the cloak from in front of the charging bull] is a philanthropic manifestation, an act of gentlemanly abnegation, characteristic of the race. In boxing, none of the fighters have anyone's help, no protection, no defense, he has to base himself in his own skill, symbol of the individualism of the Anglo Saxon. The judge (Juez del campo) represents cold, inexorable, and impassive justice and the law that dominates all in this austere and strong race. In bullfighting the most important quality is valor, in boxing, resistance, perseverance and indefatigable tenacity, indomitable obstinacy that turns men into

²⁵⁴ *La Patria de México*, 20 July 1897, p. 1.

powerful machines, capable of achieving certain ends. With a “caretazo” a bullfighter goes to the infirmary, the bruised boxer, bathed in blood, with his cheek bones broken, ribs sunk, does not abandon to fight, but already fallen, impotent, half dead, perhaps damaged forever, for action and movements. Fitzsimmons is old and Corbett is young, the first represents calm, astuteness, the second impetuosity, agility fire. The first won, it had to be, precisely because the bull is blind and brutal and the calculating bullfighter wins with reflection and cold blood. Within this is enclosed the secret to colossal success, in science, in industry, in war, in dominating the world which has been the patrimony and will be the future of the Anglo Saxon race. Each time the Latin race creates a Napoleon full of ambition, drive, and enthusiasm, the Anglo Saxon puts forth a Wellington, obstinate inflexible and each time a Trafalgar is offered, the powerful race finds a Nelson...men like this make the philosophy of boxing.

As this section has shown, the reaction of the Mexican public sphere to the first inroads of physical culture and pugilism in the late-nineteenth century was largely one of repugnance to perceptions of cultural barbarity, Anglo brutishness, and the imposition of American cultural peculiarities on an unwilling Mexican public sphere. Reading between the lines of these disgusted narratives, however, yields important insights into the growing fascination of the *populacho* with these imported spectacles of marginally modern masculinity. Beyond a refutation of American cultural influence in Mexico, these writers evince a greater concern with the Mexican masses whose tastes were increasingly (as the elite perceived so) detached from those of their social “betters.”

Starting around the turn to the century, Mexicans from across the class spectrum began to organize and petition the government to allow the transnational culture of pugilism and physical culture to take root on Mexican soil. Though the presence of foreign athletes would continue to be highly influential (until the late 1920s), and several Mexican athletes worked under the tutelage of American “professors,” in Mexico and the United States, local initiative sought to bring the symbolic practices from the pages of transnational media to nascent public spaces dedicated to sport. This process is examined in the following section.

**“The Strongest man in Mexico is now a Mexican,” Ugartechea, Esperón, de la Tijera,
Aguilar, Colín and the Mexicanization of the Masculine Body**

Enrique Ugartechea (1882-1966), the son of a minor Porfirian bureaucrat from Veracruz, was arguably the first Mexican to successfully challenge a long stream of foreign athletes and strongmen on their own terms - the public display of knowledge and action in the field of physical culture. Over the course of his long career he filled several roles: national and transnational emblem of Mexican masculinity, professor of physical culture in private clubs and public schools, a founder of Mexican *lucha libre*, early movie actor, and a writer who sought to convince Mexicans that to attain the status of “modern” they must appropriate international conceptions of virile masculinity.²⁵⁵

Ugartechea first garnered public acclaim in 1903, when as twenty-one year old he traveled from Veracruz to Mexico City to challenge the famous Sicilian wrestler, “Romulus,” for the *champeonato* [sic] *de México*.²⁵⁶ For weeks he dogged the Italian, who brushed him off and insulted his supposed lack of “reputation” via the press. Ugartechea persisted, raising the necessary thousand pesos (about five hundred dollars) that the well established Italian demanded

²⁵⁵ Though professional wrestling or *lucha libre*, is a well known Mexican pastime, most histories of the sport/theater begin with the first concerted professional matches in the 1930s. I argue that the roots of this practice lay in the interactions between Mexican athletes (such as Ugartechea) and foreign practitioners of what was variously known as “catch as catch can,” *lucha*, and Greco-Roman wrestling. The stream of knowledge is clear in at least one case: Ugartechea is listed as the mentor for one of the most famous *lucha libre* wrestlers of the mid-twentieth century, the bodybuilder Luis Ramírez Romero, known variously as *El Chino* (The Chinaman) and *El Leñador* (The Lumberjack), and *El Gladiador* (The Gladiator). Ramírez Romero wrestled in 1950s. In 1918, Ugartechea appeared in the Mexican version of a then famous Italian movie series that revolved around the character “Maciste,” the movie was titled *Maciste Turista*. In the last ten years, *lucha libre* has received considerable scholarly attention due to its connection to working class political mobilization, particularly after the Mexico City earthquake of 1985. See: Heather Levi, *The World of Lucha Libre: Secrets, Revelations, and Mexican National Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008) and Gilbert M. Joseph, *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

²⁵⁶ “La Lucha entre Romulus y Ugartechea: Infame Corrida de Toros” *El País*, 29 June 1903; *Diario del Hogar*, 20 June 1903; *El Imparcial*, 21 June 1903; “Lucha Atlética en Chapultepec,” *La Patria*, 15 September 1903. Brief accounts of this event and of Ugartechea as a “peculiar figure” between theater and sport figure in many writings about this period. See: Heriberto García Rivas, *Historia de la literatura mexicana* (México: Textos Universitarios, S.A., 1971), p. 265; Daniel Cosío Villegas, Francisco R. Calderón, Luis González y González, Emma Cosío Villegas, and Moisés González Navarro, *Historia moderna de México* (México: Editorial Hermes, 1955).

to put his title on the line.²⁵⁷ “With all the formalities of a duel,” Ugartechea visited newspaper offices to show his official permit from the *Ayuntamiento* of Tacubaya and declared his *padrino* to be the young boxer from Oaxaca, Salvador Esperón, a fellow Mexican practitioner of physical culture.²⁵⁸ Established forms of public challenge (*reto*), shifted the reckoning of personal honor from dueling to boxing.²⁵⁹

On Sunday afternoon, the 27th of June, 1903, the much anticipated bout finally took place. After a heavy downpour that kept most spectators away from the regularly scheduled bullfight in the bullring of Chapultepec Park, the “curious” and “anxious” crowd filled the stands to watch the young Mexican in action.²⁶⁰ The “trained monkeys,” employees of the bullring, spread cloth over the ground where the two men were to fight to keep their feet from slipping in the mud. When the signal was given, both men emerged, stripped to the waist, and exhibited their “herculean” musculature. From the beginning of the bout it was clear to the observer from *El País* that Ugartechea, while a remarkable specimen of manhood, was unpracticed in the art of Greco-Roman wrestling.²⁶¹ While the public booed and threw garbage at the Italian victor who escaped the ring under an umbrella, the Mexican audience cheered Ugartechea who acknowledged the crowd amid a downpour of sombreros.²⁶²

From this debut, and throughout the rest of the year, Ugartechea and his fellow athletes, the boxing professors Salvador Esperón and Fernando Colín held a number of similar exhibitions

²⁵⁷ “Entre Romulus y Ugartechea,” *El País*, 19 June 1903; 21 June 1903; 23 June 1903.

²⁵⁸ “Con las formalidades de un duelo,” *La Voz de México*, 27 June 1903; *El País*, 24 June 1903; *El Imparcial*, 21 June 1903. The Reforma Athletic Club, most of whose members were American or British, took “special interest” in this bout and declared for the press that the victory would be the “strongest man in Mexico.” Bull fights had taken place in Chapultepec park since early in the colonial era, and the Chapultepec bullring was one of the largest venues for spectator sports in Mexico at the time. Nicolás RÁngel, *Historia Del Toreo En México: Epoca Colonial <1529-1821>* (México: Imp. M.L. Sánchez, 1924).

²⁵⁹ On dueling in Mexico during the late Pofririato see Piccato, *The Tyranny of Opinion* and Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club*.

²⁶⁰ Chapultepec Park was the location of the Presidential Palace and the site of a bullring since the colonial era.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, *La Voz de México*.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

in bullrings (Chapultepec and Mexico), theaters (*Tivoli de Eliseo, Renacimiento, Abreu, Principal*), casinos (*Cosmopolitan Club*) and carnivals (Mérida) around Mexico and they were hailed as exemplar young Mexican males.²⁶³ One observer commented that with the poor quality of bullfighting in Mexico, the only bright spot in public entertainment was watching the advances of the Mexican strongman as the enormous crowds showered him with flowers.²⁶⁴ In January of 1904, Ugartechea and Esperón traveled from Mexico City to Veracruz by train and then by boat to Mérida, where they staged a special attraction for that city's carnival.²⁶⁵

By mid-1904, Ugartechea had made such an impression on the Mexican public as a modern athlete that he was contracted to travel with the Mexican delegation to the St. Louis World's Fair.²⁶⁶ Though little record of this trip to St. Louis remains, one of the prime attractions of the exposition was a series of wrestling matches that were advertised around the expansive exposition grounds. The correspondent for *El País* in St. Louis informed Mexican readers that along with a very respectable showing for the Mexican pavilion and much interest in Mexican beer and mining, "our compatriot" Ugartechea was scheduled to take on an American wrestler in this "enormously popular" sport.²⁶⁷ Alongside Mexico's carefully chosen representatives

²⁶³ *El País*, 9 July 1903; 5 August 1903; 28 August 1903; 17 September 1903; *El Popular*, 25 January 1904.

²⁶⁴ *El País*, 17 September 1903.

²⁶⁵ *El Popular*, 25 January 1904.

²⁶⁶ *La Voz de México*, 19 May 1904. The Mexican delegation was one of the most visible exhibitors and the first to construct its pavilion in St. Louis. Along with artists, scientists, and government representatives, the Mexican delegation sent *charros* (Mexican cowboys) and Ugartechea, who was identified as a "professional wrestler." See: Charles M. Kurtz, *The Saint Louis World's Fair of 1904, In Commemoration of the Acquisition of the Louisiana Territory; a Handbook of General Information, Profusely Illustrated* (Saint Louis: Gottschalk Printing Company, 1904). For the emblematic participation of the Mexican government in series of world's fairs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries see: Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fair*.

²⁶⁷ *El País*, 4 July 1904. It is difficult to say if this match ever took place. A search of the *St. Louis Republic*, shows that wrestling matches were indeed taking place at the venue, "The Standard," cited by the correspondent for *El País*, but there is no mention of Ugartechea taking part. It is likely that Ugartechea, if he did engage in bouts in the United States, did so under an assumed name.

abroad, an athlete figured for the first time as a symbol in the traveling representation of Mexican modernity.²⁶⁸

This was the first of many extended trips that Ugartechea made across the border and across the Atlantic to represent Mexican attainment in physical culture and to continue his education in that “science”.²⁶⁹ After almost a year in the United States, the wrestler returned to Mexico City after his “important athletic work in a center of physical culture in the north.”²⁷⁰ While in the United States, Ugartechea had learned from a number of athletes and when he returned to Mexico he brought this new knowledge along with exotic body building equipment that had never before been seen in Mexico.²⁷¹

Throughout the first months of 1905, Ugartechea worked to build a client base for a club dedicated to cultivating the Mexican male body toward transnational norms of masculinity that he had studied while in the United States and it was then that he first performed feats of “virility” in front of Mexican and American audiences in the capital.²⁷² He unveiled the new and modern equipment that he had imported for that purpose and went to work training his compatriots. By July, he had organized what was likely the first all-Mexican exhibition of strength and physical

²⁶⁸ Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fair*.

²⁶⁹ I have located around a dozen records verifying Enrique Ugartechea's travels abroad as a professional wrestler. Though he claimed to have wrestled in various countries, he likely did so under an assumed name. One such trip abroad, in April of 1909, Ugartechea crossed the Mexican border at Laredo, the only Mexican not to be listed as “miner” or “laborer.” *Lists of Aliens Arriving at Brownsville, Del Rio, Eagle Pass, El Paso, Laredo, Presidio, Rio Grande City, and Roma, Texas, May 1903-June 1909, and at Aros Ranch, Douglas, Lochiel, Naco and Nogales, Arizona, July 1906-December 1910* (National Archives Microfilm Publication A3365, 5 rolls); Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85; National Archives, Washington, D.C. It is likely that Ugartechea was exposed to American and British cultures as a resident of the bustling port city of Veracruz, which was the point of entry for most maritime travelers to Mexico from the United States and Europe.

²⁷⁰ “Regreso de un atleta,” *El País*, 17 December 1904.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.* Other basic athletic equipment, like boxing gloves, had been available since the late 1870s by the representative of the American “Spaulding” Company, which advertised itself as “The only sporting goods house in the city.” See: *The Massey-Gilbert Blue Book of Mexico; A Directory in English of the City of Mexico* (Mexico: Massey-Gilbert Co, 1901).

²⁷² “YMCA Athletic Meet Signal Event,” *MH*, 2 February 1905; *El Sport de Méjico, El Diario*, 30 July 1905.

culture, at the *Teatro Renacimiento*, between the zócalo and the Alameda.²⁷³ The Mexico City press, particularly *El Mundo Ilustrado*, aided Ugartechea in his efforts by publishing lengthy editorials on the social value of physical culture and several full-page photo spreads illustrating the exotic new equipment and muscular bodies that the gymnasium produced.²⁷⁴

A reporter for *El Diario* marveled at the quick sell-out of all seats at the theater for those fans who wished to witness the novel import and was further impressed by “the truly frenetic enthusiasm, our public not being accustomed to this class of functions, [which] is natural for this type of *sport viril* [sic].”²⁷⁵ Amid the public excitement, Ugartechea was able to side step the law by staging a boxing exhibition by Salvador Esperón, now listed as a “professor” at the club, and one López, from the competing *Club Olímpico*. Since the first years of the twentieth century, sporadic boxing exhibitions including Esperón, Fernando Colín, and others had been grudgingly permitted by the Porfirian establishment only if they served some greater good, such as charities for earthquake victims or benefits for foreigners residing in Mexico.²⁷⁶ Public exhibition matches also continued under the watchful eyes of the Porfirian elite in places like *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria*. Boxing, at least on one occasion, took the place of swords to settle a duel between men identified as “a young boxing professor” (likely Esperón or Colín) and

²⁷³ This *Renacimiento* opened in 1900 and was known as one of the most elite spaces in the city. It played host to a number of French and Italian opera troops. It had a seating capacity of 1,800-2,000 and was filled to capacity for Ugartechea’s exhibitions. See: Percy F. Martin, *Mexico of the Twentieth Century* (London: E. Arnold, 1907), pp. 227-228.; Reau Campbell, *Campbell’s New Revised Complete Guide and Descriptive Book of Mexico* (Chicago: Rogers & Smith Co, 1909) and Adolfo Prantl and José L. Grosó, *La ciudad de México, novísima guía universal de la capital de la República Mexicana* (México: J. Buxó, 1901), p. 772.

²⁷⁴ See the seven photographs entitled “Cultura Física Ugartechea,” *El Mundo Ilustrado*, 13 August 1905 and four photographs entitled “Ugartechea: Científico,” *El Mundo Ilustrado*, 15 June 1905.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, “El Sport de Méjico.”

²⁷⁶ One such match occurred in the Salon Verdi, to raise funds for the repatriation of a beloved Italian fencing instructor. “Asaltos de Esgrima,” *El Popular*, 9 February 1902. Another benefit match gathered funds to send to the victims of an earthquake in Guerrero, and was organized by the longtime proponents of physical culture, Ernesto and Emilio Lobato. “Indigentes de Guerrero,” *El Tiempo*, 19 February 1902. One benefit for the French fencing instructor Fournier ended early when the crowd became horrified at the amount of bloodshed in a match between Colín and Esperón. “En honor del Sr. Fournier,” *El Popular*, 23 September 1902.

a “gentleman” listed only by his initials.²⁷⁷ By late 1905, the *Club Ugartechea* regularly “exhibited” boxing and wrestling matches between Mexicans and African-Americans in front of “enormous” Mexican audiences in improvised rings constructed in casinos like the *Cosmopolitan Club*.²⁷⁸ By this time, the writer José Juan Tablada had become the manager of the competing Olympic Club.²⁷⁹ The crowds that attended these matches were composed largely of the younger generation for whom this type of novel diversion “aroused the most excitement.”²⁸⁰ Ugartechea also continued to stage wrestling matches in the bullring of Chapultepec against the African-American Joe Maljoy (who likely came with Ugartechea from the United States for this purpose) to the joy of Mexican observers. These diverse venues, elite theaters, clubs and bullrings, engaged audiences from the both the lower and upper classes.²⁸¹

One series of boxing matches that generated multiple responses both in this era and in subsequent memoirs included a representative array of individuals and gives a window into the liminal legality of the sport in this period. At the Club Ugartechea, on 28 July 1905, Salvador Esperón, the Oaxacan born linguist and boxer, took on one López in front of a sold-out crowd. Esperón’s “seconds” were the writer José Juan Tablada and the conservatory trained pianist Villaseñor.²⁸² As the five-round bout progressed, the women in the crowd, horrified at the bloodshed, “screamed ‘no more! no more!’ upon seeing the near murder that Salvador Esperón

²⁷⁷ “Un duelo,” *El Tiempo*, 14 April 1903.

²⁷⁸ The Cosmopolitan was a mixed voluntary association that counted both Mexicans and Americans as members. It was founded to challenge the exclusivity of elite retreats like the Lakeside Club which was generally not open to Mexicans. Another attraction of the Cosmopolitan Club, as it was touted to tourists, was the legalized gambling. As would later occur in the United States, the patrons of the Cosmopolitan were treated to prizefights while they gambled. See: William Schnell, Jr., *Integral Outsiders: The American Colony in Mexico City, 1876 – 1911* (Wilmington, Del: SR Books, 2001), p. 36, and Robert South Barrett, *Standard Guide to the City of Mexico and Vicinity* (City of Mexico: Modern Mexico Pub. Co, 1900), p. 75.

²⁷⁹ *El Diario*, 5 November 1905.

²⁸⁰ “La exhibición atletica de anoche en el Club Ugartechea,” *El País*, 22 October 1905.

²⁸¹ While many of the theaters such as the Renacimiento were widely cited as elite spaces, the bullring attracted both elite and popular audiences. See: Michael Johns, *The City of Mexico in the Age of Díaz* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).

²⁸² José Juan Tablada and Guillermo Sheridan, *Diario: (1900 - 1944)* (Nueva biblioteca mexicana, 117. México, D.F.: Univ. Nacional Autónoma de México, Centro de Estudios Literarios, 1992).

was committing upon Gaspar López.”²⁸³ The efforts of Tablada and others to cultivate physical culture, what he called his “afan de propogar cultura física,” were sometimes ridiculed in the satiric press, which labeled their activities “running and jumping around like clowns.”²⁸⁴

In the final years of the Porfiriato, the Mexican appropriation of the growing mass spectacle of prizefighting and wrestling was spurred forward by the combination of civic social activism and changing norms of permissibility in the public sphere. Nowhere was this process more visible than in the newspapers and *revistas* that increasingly catered to popular tastes: *El Imparcial* and *El Mundo Ilustrado*.²⁸⁵ Combined with these public sphere forces was the increasing prestige of Mexican athletes who had successfully challenged foreigners: no longer was the brutal culture of prizefighting relegated to foreigners who imposed the refuse of their culture onto an unwilling Mexican audience. Early physical culture *científicos*- Ugartechea, Colín, and Esperón- were also tapped by the military, the Ministry of Public Instruction, and private entrepreneurs to guide soldiers, students and the public in the Mexicanization of boxing and physical culture.²⁸⁶

The period immediately before the Revolution marked a shift from the late nineteenth century in terms of the existence of Mexican athletes and an expanding infrastructure of clubs and associations who held regular exhibitions to sold-out crowds; most of the permits to hold these types of public spectacles were still denied.²⁸⁷ The Mexico City *Ayunatmiento*, vacillated

²⁸³ Unidentified newspaper article cited in Talán, *Y...Fueron Idolos!*, p. 24.

²⁸⁴ Tablada, *Diario*.

²⁸⁵ Mraz, *Looking for Mexico*.

²⁸⁶ *Archivo Historico de la Ciudad*: Fondo Ayuntamiento, Secretaría General, Espectaculos Publico: Vol. 3926 Exp. 1.; “Establecimiento de clases libres de gimnasia para los alumnos de las escuelas profesionales,” Mexico. *Boletín de instrucción pública* (Ants Cazuela, México: Tipografía Economica, 1906), pp. 517-18. *Archivo General de la Nación*, Fondo Propiedad Artistica y literaria/ Salvador Esperón, “El Boxeo Científico,” Caja 684 exp. 8.

²⁸⁷ *AHDF*, Fondo Ayuntamiento, Secretaría General: Espectáculos Públicos, Volume 1382 Exp. 69 “Joe Maljoy, Plaza de Toros.”

in the reasoning for these prohibitions, but the various and often interdepartmental communications suggest an unwillingness to take definitive stance on the growing popularity of pugilistic entertainments. While this bureaucratic log jam succeeded in stopping exhibitions on several occasions, the tenacity with which club presidents like José Juan Tablada and Baldomero Romero pushed the issue resulted in several public and lucrative exhibitions. One such petition, submitted by Baldomero Romero and containing over three hundred signatures, deserves lengthy treatment. It is a disquisition on the envisioned role of boxing for the good of the nation and represents the capstone of public sphere initiative in this period.

The *Club Atlético Internacional*: Baldomero Romero, José Juan Tablada and the Logic Behind Virile Action

The reluctance of the Porfirian governing elite to cede control of modern physical culture to civil social organizations like the *Club Atlético Internacional* and the *Club Olímpico* played out in repeated petitions by these organizations to reverse the decisions of Mexico City Mayor Guillermo de Landa y Escandón that prohibited public boxing matches. At stake, petitioners argued, was no less than the future of the Mexican nation as a progressive entity. In the few instances when exhibitions were allowed, the municipal government stipulated arbitrary rules, defining the length of rounds and that combatants only hit with their fists open.²⁸⁸ When petitions for boxing matches were denied, and this happened in the overwhelming majority of cases, bureaucrats acted under the orders of the mayor, citing simply that there were no laws on boxing and that therefore it would be prohibited (“no hay lugar”).²⁸⁹ These prohibitions vacillated in their reasoning and on at least one occasion, when Luís Sarría was granted

²⁸⁸ AHDF, Fondo Ayuntamiento, Secretaría General: Espectáculos Públicos , Vol. 1396, Exp. 1096.

²⁸⁹ AHDF, Ayuntamiento: Justicia, licencias en general, Vol. 2990, Exp. 25; Vol. 2990, Exp. 520; Vol. 3039, Exp. 5017.

permission to open a boxing gym, that permission was revoked before he open the doors.²⁹⁰ The most common reason given for limiting the freedom of association was that boxing created lawlessness and scandal, with exhibitions that ended with public outrage, like the match between Jim Smith and Cuauhtémoc Aguilar in the Welton Circus in Mexico City.²⁹¹ Though Mexicans were allowed to open clubs dedicated to physical culture, the government sought to limit the activities that took place there, denying the petition of the *Centro Deportivo de México* to serve alcoholic beverages at their location next to the zócalo on Calle San Francisco.²⁹²

Proponents of physical culture were angered by what they saw as the atavistic tastes of a small elite that governed the behavior of the masses. The pleas of socially concerned Mexicans for permission to stage bouts were penned by the leaders of these novel groupings who impugned “backward” thinking public functionaries for their intransience and misunderstanding of the goals of these displays of manliness. The remaining evidence of this movement exists in the municipal archives of Mexico City and in the hundreds of pages of newspaper articles written by their supporters in the press. The press continued to play an important role for these petitioners as a legitimizing agent; they often included glowing press accounts as supporting evidence for their claims as virilizing public forces.²⁹³ As important as the study of surgery and medicine, they argued, was the development of healthy and resistant bodies to aid in national defense and positive eugenic evolution. The suspicions and supplications of the conservative

²⁹⁰ AHDF, Fondo Ayuntamiento, Secretaria General Espectaculos Publicos, Vol. 1393, Exp. 888.

²⁹¹ AHDF, Fondo Ayuntamiento, Secretaria General Espectaculos Publicos, “Acuerdo del Gobernador,” Vol. 1393, Exp. 872.

²⁹² AHDF, Licencias para cantinas no concedidas, Vol. 1361, Exp. 65. The government inspector described the locale thusly: el “Centro Deportivo Mexicano” se encuentra establecido en el Segundo piso de la casa numero 37 de la Avenida de San Francisco y el local consta de un salon que tiene cuatro balcones que dan a dicha Avenida y uno que da a la 3/a de Motolinia. Ese lugar esta destinado para los diversos juegos de “sport” y se comunica por el lado Sur con otro salon en el que, en pequenos gabinetes, hay excusados, bano de tina, y mesas para masajes. El edificio en que se encuentra establecido el citado Centro Deportivo Mexicano consta de tres pisos yel primero de ellos se haya ocupado por el cinematografico “Metropoli” el Segundo por el establecimiento de que se trata y por various despachos particulares y el tercero de esto tambien...

²⁹³ AHDF, Gobernación: Asuntos Varios, Volume 812 exp. 1690.

Catholic press, holding out in the face of overwhelming public opinion in favor of sport (the petitioners singled out the main Catholic daily as the *only* newspaper that did not praise their efforts and whose “ideas are backward and ancient in these matters”), paired with the organs of political power to suppress the vital energy of Mexican youth.

For those in favor of sport, this was more than irresponsible, it was a pernicious attempt to retard national regeneration. Brothers Ireneo and Baldomero Romero, for example, scions of an aristocratic Mexico City family, wrote and circulated these petitions to the “sportmen” and newspapers of the metropolis, pushing the case for boxing as a crucial means of social and cultural advancement; a way to narrow the gap between Mexico and the “most advanced countries.”²⁹⁴ In the process, they collected hundreds of signatures from likeminded urbanites who sought to influence public policy. They were stymied in their efforts to stage regular public exhibitions by Japanese, African-American, and Mexican practitioners of modern sport: Mexicans had much to learn from these men and could not afford to slip deeper into effeminacy and cultural stagnation. To support their petitions, the members of the *Club Atlético*, included copies of the magazine they had published over the preceding years, *Revista de Sport y Cultura Física* along with newspaper clippings in praise of their “manly” efforts.²⁹⁵

The petitioners based their arguments on several interconnected ideas. First, they stressed, Mexico was a late-comer to the modern institutionalization of physical culture; but if left alone civil society could lead Mexicans out of this malaise. Vigorous, physically adept athletes were the force behind the well-known “triumph” of Anglo-Saxons over lesser races. History, as they interpreted it, clearly demonstrated that the ascendance of national races was tied

²⁹⁴ AHDF, *Juegos Permitidos*, Tomo 14, Exp. 888, 12 July 1911.

²⁹⁵ An exhaustive search of numerous Mexican newspaper repositories found no remaining copies of this magazine.

to their conscious cultivation of manly virtues. Greeks and Romans, before losing to the more vigorous Germanic tribes, made physical education the focal point of childrearing and gave worship of the physical almost “cultlike” status. These lessons of history were clearly visible in the recent accomplishments of superior races: “All the governments in the world, currently, allow their men to become sportmen [sic], to make roubust and clear minded individuals, not to make *effeminate and rachitic men*.”²⁹⁶

These sportmen interpreted the near mythological charge of Theodore Roosevelt’s “Rough Riders” in Cuba as the clearest evidence to prove nations that vaunted primitive physicality in the service of national regeneration provided essential examples of how to be modern and manly. The pairing of American cowboys with the Eastern urban elite showed the genius of American physical culture. They cited and quoted Baron Harcourt, paragon of European martial nobility, as irrefutable support for these interpretations.²⁹⁷ Incorporating the ideas of foreign “experts” and intellectuals they impugned those Mexicans like Mayor Landa y Escandón who sought to stifle the forward thinking elements in civil society who, they stressed, prevented Mexican greatness in the competitive struggle of nations. It was a “*crime of a weak country*” to pretend the “virile youth” should follow in the footsteps of those effeminate elements of Mexican society who “rode in carriages about the country” and celebrated bullfighting as the only national sport.²⁹⁸ Who was the Mayor of Mexico City, the petitioners implied, to question a thinker as elevated as Maurice Maeterlinck (who had just won the Nobel Prize):

²⁹⁶ Ibid. Emphasis in the original, 12 August 1910.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

they are ignorant of the precise forms of practice, rules, and severe discipline that characterize all “matches” of this virile sport in countries that are without a doubt more civilized than Mexico—even though as Mexicans it embarrasses us to say it—like France, England, the United States and others who enjoy powerful merit and about which have written in favor elevated personages of the intellectual world, that we won’t resist the desire to transcribe, as the best defense of pugilism, the sage maxim of the celebrated poet Maeterlinck which says “It seems paradoxical; but it is easy to prove that the art of pugilism, where it is practiced, becomes a garment of meekness and of peace.”²⁹⁹

The Japanese, they further argued, were another case in point. Their defeat of the Russian empire in 1905 was due precisely to their cultivation of the virtues of physicality. Along with African-American boxers, Japanese athletes taught the Mexican elite the “science” of iiu-jitsu other martial arts in which “small” men were able to conquer larger opponents through the deployment of the “science” of bodily combat. In 1909, Mexican men and women attended open air exhibitions where they were intrigued by Japanese sumo for the first time.³⁰⁰ Dozens of Japanese instructors and American pugilists descended on Mexico City, where they gave exhibitions in front of the aging Porfirio Díaz, and were incorporated into the training for the most elite Mexican youth, the cadets who attended class in on the grounds of the presidential palace in Chapultepec park.³⁰¹ The excitement over imported physical culture extended all the way to the National Agriculture School, where student appropriated sport into their curriculum in imitation of American colleges.³⁰²

While self-appointed teachers of Mexican youth like the Romero brothers explicitly stated that Mexicans should imitate the physical culture of advanced nations like Japan and the United States, conservative commentators raged against the inhumanity of violent sport and the

²⁹⁹ Ibid.; Maeterlinck was Belgian poet and essayist who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1911.

³⁰⁰ *El País*, 5 November 1909.

³⁰¹ “Gran entusiasmo reina para el festival deportivo,” *El Diario*, 20 June 1910; *El País*, 9 August 1909.

³⁰² “Se forma una club atletico en la escuela de agricultura,” *El Imparcial*, 18 July 1910.

base, mimetic tendency that they identified as central to the implantation of boxing and Japanese martial arts in Mexico. The Catholic daily *El País*, after first congratulating the rapid increase in sporting clubs throughout the Republic, thundered against the perceived betrayal of Mexican values that threatened their civilization. In a front page editorial, conservatives proclaimed, “We will be more humane than our neighbors:”

The American and Americanizing newspapers of this capital, like the injudicious public that systematically forgets all their own [customs] in order to inculcate themselves with foreign “vices and virtues” in flushed mixtures, cry now for the loss of their favorite spectacle, *el box* [sic], as Yankee as it is savage.

The reporters crowded around the Señor Governor of the Federal District, don Guillermo Landa y Escandón, inquiring why he had frustrated their great satisfaction in seeing two men crunch bones, denying them the permit to fight; to which our humanitarian Sr. Governor responded “You can announce, in my name, that boxing has reached its end in this District.”

In the name of humanity: Bravo!³⁰³

Catholic observers, like their sportmen counterparts, looked to the lessons of history and current events abroad. The interracial prizefight between African-American Jack Johnson and the “white hope” Jim Jefferies in Reno on July 4, 1910, provided fodder for their excoriations. With the victory of *negro* Jack Johnson, the “arrogant and savage Yankee” had received his due.³⁰⁴ Not only were the race riots after the fight proof of the danger of boxing for the public, it also dealt a blow to the “haughtiness of the white man of the north, who thinks himself superior to all men not born in the land of Linch [sic] and shows his vigor by cruelly abusing the weak and killing the unfortunate *negros* with repugnant impunity.”³⁰⁵ Pugilism as a vehicle for moral

³⁰³ *El País*, 16 April 1910.

³⁰⁴ *El País*, 9 August 1910.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

and physical regeneration, as these same writers had proclaimed less than a year before, had become of symbol of servile imitation and foreigner worship among sadly misled Mexicans.³⁰⁶

The celebration or denigration of appropriating foreign cultural forms is central to the competing world views of these commentators. While proponents of physical culture sought to circumvent prohibitions on the display of “virile” sport; the mouthpieces of the Catholic church raged against the barbarity of arrogant North Americans and the inroads of their culture into Mexico. This was a complicated cultural imperialism; the ideological proponents of foreign forms of physical culture were not marginal members of the Mexico City society, but respected entrepreneurs who played a vital role in the social life of the city.³⁰⁷ The official journalistic organs of the Porfirian government added to the complexity of the debate by offering their congratulation to the valuable initiatives of the Romero brothers. Their “scientific” learning paired with the instruction of foreign professional like the Afro-Dutch Jim Smith, African Americans Kid Lavigne and Kid Mitchell, the Japanese martial artists Shinzuro, Take, and Yase, and the French wrestler Eugenio Spinner to offer Mexican youth the “undoubtedly beneficial” effects of physical culture that, in addition to other ameliorative effects, would give their bodies “elegance and beauty.”³⁰⁸ *El Diario* congratulated the Romero brothers and encouraged their letter writing campaign to the governors of all states of the Republic that offered instruction in

³⁰⁶ At the opening of the *Club Atlético Internacional* in 1909, members of the press, among them journalists for *El País*, had congratulated the directors of the club for staging “clean” bouts, even in front of many women and girls, that fascinated the “forward thinking youth” of the city. The Catholic press even celebrated the staging of boxing matches on Christmas Eve. In less than a year, as shown in the excerpts above, boxing had become shorthand for conservative angst. *El País*, 8 November 1909, 11 August 1910, 24 December 1910.

³⁰⁷ The Romero brothers opened their gym in the one of the most highly visible spaces of the city, a few blocks from the zocalo. They served as god-parents at baptisms in the cathedral.

³⁰⁸ “Iniciativa del Club Atlético Internacional,” *El Diario*, 24 July 1910; “Reina Gran entusiasmo por el festival deportivo.” 20 June 1910.

combat sport for their citizens. *El Imparcial* threw its lot in with the *Club Atlético Internacional*, promising to report and assist in the “elevation of ‘sport’ in [their] nation.”³⁰⁹

This concerted campaign on the part of highly visible elements of civil society and the press extended throughout the country, but focused first on ameliorating the effects of urban life in Mexico City. Not only was cultivating manly bodies essential to Mexico in time of war, but boxing and the ethic of physical culture were a panacea for number of other social concerns:

it can offer to the motherland (madre patria) a contingent of serene and conditioned soldiers who in times of danger are not derailed before bloodshed nor before the glint of arms and that in peace time are not drained and exhausted working the *machines in a factory*. Today, now that our people are beginning to scrutinize the word “SPORT” and they start to understand its meaning we should help them like one helps a child when it takes its first steps, facilitating them by any means possible, leveling any obstacles that arise, so that with sure steps they advance to the ideal perfection of the race.³¹⁰

The Eve of Revolution, Boxing at an Impasse on the Margins: Conclusions

The above reasoning, that the diffusion of physical culture and boxing would create superior soldiers for the motherland, came at a key moment in Mexican history. Less than a year later, the events that would spiral into the Mexican Revolution made the abstract suppositions of reformers all the more real. Cuauhtémoc Aguilar, the patriotically named boxer and would-be saloon owner, became one of the millions of casualties of war in 1916. Amid “heroic fighting” in a last-ditch effort to hold the hill of Santa Rosa in Chihuahua against the forces of Pancho Villa, Captain Aguilar was “shot mercilessly,” and died on the battlefield. The long cultivation of physical culture and his celebrity on the streets of Mexico City did little to save him amid the carnage.³¹¹

³⁰⁹ “Las carreras organizadas por el Club Atlético,” *El Imparcial* 24 June 1910; “Grandes pruebas pedestres.” 27 June 1910.

³¹⁰ AHDF, *Juegos Permitidos*, Tomo 14, Exp. 888.

³¹¹ Battle report cited in Friedrich Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 602.

For men like Aguilar, Santa María, Ugartechea, Colín and others, the opportunity to follow a novel avenue of civic social engagement and to earn a living while modernizing Mexican ideas about the body and masculinity had presented a challenge. They sought to expand the boundaries of the public sphere to accommodate a diversification of Mexican identity. They did so through rational debate and evinced their differences with the reigning Porfirian culture by tenaciously and often illegally engaging in exhibitions that drew enormous crowds. They teamed with foreign professors of physical culture like the Afro-Dutch Jim Smith, Mexican American Kid Mitchell, Japanese Conde Koma, and others who negotiated the relative political stability of the Porfirian Era to incrementally change what they viewed as outmoded cultural norms. In later years, their efforts would be cited by the well-established boxing subculture in Mexico as an outright resistance to the narrow politics of Don Porfirio Díaz.³¹²

The presence of boxing in Mexico increased with the outbreak of the Revolution. The pressing concerns of unstable governments in the 1910s allowed spaces in which civil society enjoyed a relatively broad range of autonomy and foreign athletic celebrities continued to enter the country, often skirting war zones and hoping to make a few pesos. By the 1920s, boxing was in Mexico to stay. The discourse that surrounded the sport, however, had shifted dramatically. It had undergone a process of proto-nationalization in the public sphere, but during the Revolution and the years immediately following, it became largely what it is today: an enormously popular and symbolic means of working class mobility and celebrity. This transformation is the subject of Chapter Four.

³¹² Raúl Talán, *Y..Fueron Idolos!* (México D.F.: 1954), p. 15.

CHAPTER III

“WHO WILL SAY WE ARE NOT PROGRESSING?” CUBA, “BLACK REALITY,” THE “WHITE HOPE,” PORNOGRAPHY AND THE CHALLENGE OF CUBANIZING BARBARISM, 1910-1921.

Havana, Cuba and Reno, Nevada, 1910-1915

As the African-American prizefighter Jack Johnson was finishing his breakfast at the posh Hotel Plaza on the corner of Central Park in Havana on 22 February 1915, he was approached by the hotel manager. Though Johnson had arranged for a suite, the manager explained, they would be accommodate him in the hotel. His race was not an issue, the manager dissembled, the clerk had made an error and the hotel was full. On hearing of this affront to an African-American celebrity, the Afro-Cuban politician Eligio Madán publically announced that Jack Johnson would be staying with his family in Havana. Though it was dangerous and politically unwise to speak in terms of racial identity for Afro-Cubans in 1915, Madán sought to rally Afro-Cubans behind Johnson in his defense of the heavyweight title against the Great White Hope, Jess Willard, claiming that the “white hope” was about to come face to face with “black reality.” Johnson’s celebrity, for many Afro-Cubans, was a point a pride and an indicator of black accomplishment. Johnson’s physical presence in Havana in 1915 was not the first time Cubans had confronted the meaning of black celebrity, his impact on transnational race relations, and the implications of modern prizefighting for a range of interconnected issues that swirled around the meaning of being Cuban.

In the weeks surrounding the globally debated 1910 prizefight between Jack Johnson and the first “White Hope” Jim Jefferies, Havana’s readers devoured a daily barrage of localized press coverage about the distant racial and gendered drama unfolding in Reno, Nevada.³¹³ Johnson, the notorious *bon vivant*, actor and boxer, was presented within the Cuban public sphere as a symbol of the peculiar cultural and racial “problems” of the United States that, once again, proved the barbarity of American racial norms often connected with a neologism disseminated widely throughout the Spanish speaking world, the “ley lynch.”³¹⁴ The social critic and editorialist Joaquín Aramburu, alarmed by the growing popularity of boxing during the latest American intervention (1906-09) and the hype over the Johnson-Jefferies match, made the association of boxing and lynching explicit as two uniquely barbaric American customs. How

³¹³ I argue that this bout was a globally significant moment because it went far beyond sport history in the United States and was most often debated in the public sphere in terms of racial superiority and Jack Johnson’s unique threat to white manhood. Of all the bouts in Johnson’s career, this match illustrates the daily lived reality of racial ideologies in the United States, and to a lesser extent, in many other countries. A sampling of newspapers from around the world in this period (France, England, South Africa, Australia, Spain etc) reveals the saturation of front pages with details of the Reno bout. In the Spanish speaking world (Spain and Spanish Speaking Latin America), Johnson’s blackness and his challenge to white authority figured prominently in the popular press in: Cuba (*Diario de la Marina, El Triunfo, La Lucha, The Havana Post*, etc; Mexico (*El Diario, El Imparcial, The Mexican Herald, El Dictámen*, etc.; Peru (*El Comercio*), Argentina (*La Crítica*) and others. Almost every newspaper consulted in archival collections in Mexico, Cuba, Argentina, Spain, and through the World Newspaper Archive, around the dates of the match contain information on the historic bout.

³¹⁴ “Again” because Cubans had, since the 1850s been made aware through press coverage and literature of the practice of lynching in the United States. It was often hailed as proof of American backwardness. Cubans, even while still under the yolk of the Spanish, castigated the United States for extra-judicial racially motivated killings. One dissertation from 1892 deals specifically with this phenomenon: José A. González y Lanuza, *La ley de lynch en los Estados Unidos; disertacion leida en la apertura de la Academia de Derecho* (Habana: La Universal, Ruiz y Hermano, 1892). See also: Feyjoo de Urbano de Sotomayor, *Isla de Cuba* (Paris: Impr. de A. Blondeau, 1852), pp. 48-49. Also, *Diario de la Marina*, 27 September 1900; 14 August 1901; 30 August 1901; 13 October 1904; 14 November 1908. These critiques of race relations in the United States deserve further study. Cuban “sportmen” could read as early as September of 1909, the Cuban press’s reproduction of the racialized rhetoric around the proposed Johnson-Jefferies bout. Johnson was portrayed as the enemy of white America and that he was a “Yellow [cowardly] Negro,” despite the fact that he had been challenging the white champion, Jim Jefferies, for almost a decade. Jefferies, until 1910, had refused to fight a black boxer and was only drawn out of retirement in order to win back the title for the white race. “Vida Deportiva: El boxeo de combate, J. Jefferies contra Jack Johnson,” 22 September 1909; The best scholarly work on the saga of Johnson-Jefferies and its intervention in the public sphere construction of race in the United States remains: Randy Roberts, *Papa Jack*.

did the United States pretend to lecture Cubans on civilization when these two examples of American culture were the most uncivilized behaviors known to man?³¹⁵

Not only was the *negro* Johnson a practitioner of a frequently illegal profession that bridged high and low culture and that had previously been dominated by white “champions,” he had unabashedly reveled in the international fame resulting from his conquest of a leading symbol of white virility, the heavyweight boxing championship of the world.³¹⁶ Johnson, as one of the first globally visible African-American celebrities, violated a number of American cultural prohibitions: he mocked white pretensions to physical dominance over blacks and slept with and married white, “blond” women. In the process, he became one of the most hated figures in the mainstream American press, a focal point for white fears of black social mobility and sexuality, and a lens through which a global audience viewed race in the United States.³¹⁷ After 1912, he lived in self-exile in Europe and Latin America for violation of the Mann Act (popularly known as the White Slavery Act).³¹⁸ In Cuba, Johnson’s challenge to American propriety was portrayed

³¹⁵ Joaquín Aramburu, “Baturillo,” *Diario de la Marina*, 29 December 1909.

³¹⁶ There is a broad historiography on the connection of boxing to racial and gender discourse in this period. Most work has focused on the United States and the most relevant for this study is Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*. Also: Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); David Sachsman, B. S. Kittrell Rushing and Roy Morris, *Seeking a Voice: Images of Race and Gender in the 19th Century Press* (West Lafayette, Ind: Purdue University Press, 2009); Craig Friend Thompson, *Southern Masculinity: Perspectives on Manhood in the South Since Reconstruction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009). There had been several attempts to outlaw boxing, mostly left to state initiatives, but the rise of Johnson prompted a series of anti-prizefighting laws in many states, including California where the Johnson-Jefferies bout was originally scheduled to take place. For an in-depth study on the legality of boxing see: Robert G. Rodríguez and George Kimball, *The Regulation of Boxing: A History and Comparative Analysis of Policies Among American States* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2009). Johnson’s antics and the unfavorable response of white America would serve as a cautionary tale for the next African-American heavyweight champion twenty years later, Joe Louis.

³¹⁷ The best public reaction study of Johnson’s impact across the United States is Al-Toni Gilmore, *Bad Nigger!* Johnson was also covered avidly in the African-American press, with hundreds of articles appearing in the *Chicago Defender* that vacillated between support and celebration of the boxer and criticism of his handling of celebrity.

³¹⁸ David J. Langum, *Crossing Over the Line: Legislating Morality and the Mann Act* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

in vivid detail to readers of the vibrant press.³¹⁹ As Aline Helg has shown in her examination of the Cuban media surrounding the racist massacre of the *Partido Independiente de Color* in 1912, Cuban journalists wielded enormous power to shape and inform public opinion, especially when commenting on racial issues.³²⁰ As Louis Pérez Jr. has demonstrated, Cuban culture in this period evolved in close connection to popular culture currents emanating from the United States.³²¹ Cuban reporters, like the cosmopolitan Abel Linares, reproduced details of the legal battles, enormous sums of money, and the attempts by religious and social leaders to prevent the bout from taking place in California.³²² Cubans, reached throughout the island through the pages of the most prominent daily newspapers, *El Diario de la Marina*, *La Lucha*, *El Triunfo*, and *El*

³¹⁹ As discussed in the Chapter One, most of Havana's residents were literate by this time and were severed by dozens of daily newspapers and weekly and monthly magazines.

³²⁰ Helg, *Our Rightful Share*.

³²¹ Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*.

³²² "Vida Deportiva: El combate Jefferies-Johnson: detalles interesantes sobre la actitud del Gobernador de California," *Diario de la Marina*, 17 June 1910; Manuel de Linares, "El Gobernador de California y los boxeadores Jefferies y Johnson," *Diario de la Marina*, 16 June 1910; "La Contienda de los Campeones," *Diario de la Marina*, 17 June 1910; "Vida Deportiva," *Diario de la Marina*, 28 June 1910. The author of these articles, Abel Linares, was the sports editor for the most popular Cuban daily, *El Diario de la Marina*, and had been instrumental in the Cuban appropriation of baseball as a national pastime. As in Mexico, the Cuban press was a central point of dissemination for the growing transnational visibility of boxing and the cultural narratives surrounding it. Linares introduced many neologisms pertaining to prizefighting to educate Cubans on how to understand the events that were fast becoming part of public discourse. See: Roberto González Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana: A History of Cuban Baseball* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Jerry Kuntz, *Baseball Fiends and Flying Machines: The Many Lives and Outrageous Times of George and Alfred Lawson* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co, 2009); Lawrence D. Hogan, *Shades of Glory: The Negro Leagues and the Story of African-American Baseball* (National Geographic Society, 2007).

Heraldo de Cuba, were exposed to even the corporeal measurements of the “terrible boxer” Jim



Figure 3: *Diario de la Marina*, Corporeal Measurements for the "race war."

Jefferies whose explicit goal was to take back the title for white manhood.³²³

This imagining of the savior of white masculinity was reinforced by visual culture: before the films could be outlawed, Havana theaters showed curious Cuban spectators cinematic exhibitions of the boxers in preparation for the bout, deepening the inundation of the Cuban public sphere with narratives of the drama.³²⁴ By 1915, the impact of the image of Jack Johnson as an example for men of African descent in Cuba was visible not only in Havana, but in the most remote and rural points on the island. The “mulatto,” Evelio Mustelier, remembered

³²³ “Vida Deportiva,” *Diario de la Marina*, 24 October 1909

³²⁴ *La Lucha*, 5 July 1910. Films of the bout, as will be examined in this chapter, represented both a threat to racial stability and enormously lucrative new means to profit through the rising cultural phenomenon of athletics. As an entrepreneur, Jack Johnson led the way in attaining distribution rights and, in the case of Cuba after 1915, suing over the illegal reproduction of moving pictures of his bouts. One film scholar suggests: “Fight pictures pricked at the fabric of American social order to such an extent that their dissemination was halted by nothing less than an act of Congress.” Nancy Mowell Mathews, Charles Musser, and Marta Braun, *Moving Pictures: American Art and Early Film, 1880-1910* (Manchester, VT: Hudson Hills and the Williams College Museum of Art, 2005), p. 111. For a study on the business of boxing through moving pictures in this period see: Dan Streible, *Fight Pictures: A History of Boxing and Early Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

standing entranced on a street of the sugar mill town of Banes (eastern Cuba), watching large homemade metal marionettes on display outside of the local bodega.³²⁵ The marionettes represented Jack Johnson in combat with the latest white hope, Jess Willard, and they led the young mulatto into a career as a boxer that would take him to three continents and dozens of countries in the 1930s and 1940s as the *Caballero del Ring* (Gentleman of the Ring), *Kid Tunero*. The mulatto Nicolás Guillén, who would become the Cuban poet-laureate after the Revolution, cited Johnson as a hero from his boyhood.³²⁶ In the essays of Franco-Cuban Alejo Carpentier, Johnson's claims that he had been tricked into losing the 1915 match on purpose by a nefarious American government, found a willing defender. For Carpentier, who remembered the match in Havana, Johnson's plight was an example of American racial intolerance and the bout served as shorthand for the exploitive culture of American capitalism in Cuba.³²⁷ Mirta Yáñez, a Cuban author, brought the Johnson story to a new generation of Cubans, placing the boxer as victim of American imperialism and racial hatred, describing him as a "gentleman" in all facets of life.³²⁸ These narratives fit well within the anti-imperialist rhetoric of post-Revolutionary state culture, but this construction of historical memory yields a selective and incomplete understanding of the

³²⁵ This narrative will be further explored in Chapter Four, this scene was narrated by Mustelier on a number of occasions, most prominently in his autobiography: Evelio Mustelier, *Mis veinte años en el ring* (La Habana: Impresora Siglo Moderno, 1958). The book was later reprinted in Spain, where Mustelier lived after the Cuban Revolution, when professional sport was outlawed and the aging boxer was unable to make a living as a trainer and manager. Until the Revolution, he lived in Havana where he was one of the closest friends of Ernest Hemingway.

³²⁶ The phrase that Guillén used in his poem "Alla Lejos," is "Johnson, el boxeador, era nuestro modelo de campeón." (Johnson, the boxer, was our model of a champion). Guillén argued that Johnson's popularity in Cuba was a function of American cultural imperialism despite the fact that Cubans also viewed him as a symbol of resistance to rigid American racial ideology. Nicolás Guillén, Roberto Márquez, and David Arthur McMurray. *Man-making words: selected poems of Nicolas Guillen* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

³²⁷ Carpentier, admitting that he was only ten at the time, claimed to remember the fight vividly. These memories, suspiciously close to the party line, come from his essay "Deporte es Cultura," in Alejo Carpentier, María Luisa Cerrón Puga, and Félix Báez-Jorge, *Obras completas 14 Conferencias* (México: Siglo Veintiuno Ed, 1991), pp. 372-377.

³²⁸ This story, "Yo soy Jack Johnson," appeared in a two volume Cuban collection of writing about boxing including such well known Cuban authors as Nicolás Guillén, Alejo Carpentier, and José Martí paired with foreign writers such as Jack London, O. Henry, William Inglis and others. Omelio Ramos Mederos, ed., *Cuentos de boxeo* [2 vol.] (La Habana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1981).

transnational nuances surrounding early Republican Cuba and the multifaceted impact of imported cultural forms upon the newly independent country.

The timing of Cuban Independence, taking place in an era of rapid mass communication and transportation, prohibited the type of isolation that characterized the early years of sovereignty that was a blessing and a curse for most other Latin American nations in the early nineteenth century.³²⁹ From Independence onward, “becoming Cuban,” to borrow Pérez, Jr.’s phrase, was both an inward and outward oriented process largely defined by and sometimes in opposition to foreign gender and racial norms disseminated on a massive scale.³³⁰ The nascent Cuban state, as this chapter will show, regulated novel behaviors, justifying state action in positive and negative (oppositional) terms: the early importation of boxing served as a divisive point of contention between entrepreneurs and “sportmen” who sought to disseminate imported sport and those more conservative commentators in the public sphere who were determined to censure and prevent Cuban appropriation of American “barbarism.”³³¹ As we will see, in response to Cuban prohibitions on fight films, many commentators argued that legislators were succumbing to American racial norms and were ignorant of the historical trajectory of relative “racial harmony” on the island. Their assimilation of omnipresent American culture in Cuba,

³²⁹ Cuba remained a crown colony of Spain until 1898. Most other Latin American countries, after Independence in the early nineteenth century, turned inward to the often violent and chaotic process of nation building. The most salient battles were between liberals and conservatives as competing visions over the paths forward played out in politics. For the most accessible account of this period see: Thomas E. Skidmore, Peter H. Smith; and James Naylor Green, *Modern Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Howard J. Wiarda and Harvey F. Kline, *Latin American Politics and Development* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2011); E. Bradford Burns, *The Poverty of Progress: Latin America in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); and Marshall C. Eakin, *The History of Latin America: Collision of Cultures* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

³³⁰ Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*.

³³¹ The construction national consensus in oppositional terms has been developed by a number of scholars: Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) Alvin Ward Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979);

largely through the media, had warped their understanding of Cuban reality. This consumption of “Americanism” was compounded by the ease and frequency of travel to the United States.³³²

Through the journalist Linares’ experience with Negro League baseball and the first mixed-race Cuban teams to travel to the United States, he avidly and astutely commented on the racial implications of black versus white in the emerging transnational phenomenon of sport. These narratives were infused with arguments about “civilization” that coalesced, reminiscent of those in Mexico, around the most famous African-American of the era.³³³ Simultaneously, boxing was transposed onto Cuban soil and consciousness in the language of national identity, honor, and the confrontation with the flows of popular culture emanating from the United States. This was not the first moment in which Cubans expounded on the implications for barbarity and civilization that boxing posed for Cubans eager to build modern identity by choosing which ideas would define the nation. José Martí, the Cuban poet and martyr of the final War for Independence (1895-98), covered boxing matches (1882) while a reporter in exile in the United States.³³⁴ Martí abhorred boxing and viewed it as symbol of the decadent and materialistic culture of the United States while simultaneously praising the masculine and exemplar physiques of the opponents. Martí was both fascinated and repulsed, writing that amid the excitement for a heavyweight bout “the whole nation becomes a cock [fighting] ring.”³³⁵

³³² Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*.

³³³ See Chapter One for a discussion of Jack Johnson in Mexico.

³³⁴ Martí had extensive experience in the United States, living in several cities, totaling over a decade in exile. Along with Rubén Dario, he is the most well-known Latin American anti-imperialist who presciently argued that a rapidly expanding United States was on a collision course with Latin America, not only economically, but culturally. José Martí and Philip Sheldon Foner, *Our America: Writings on Latin America and the Struggle for Cuban Independence* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977). On the varying interpretations of Martí as a national symbol in Cuba and beyond see: Lillian Guerra, *Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

³³⁵ José Martí’s essay “Prizefight,” was his impressions of a bareknuckle prizefight between the first American boxing celebrity John L. Sullivan and Irish Paddy Ryan near New Orleans, in Mississippi City, 1882. It remains one of the most vivid sociological accounts of the culture of boxing in this era and Martí’s satirical wit and eye for detail

The voluminous press coverage of the distant 1910 event contributed to the rise to the nascent popularity of boxing in Cuba.³³⁶ Cubans such as Santiago Agramonte challenged upstart foreign boxers in order to defend “the colors of the nation,” accepting such challenges in front of the public via letters published in the press that drew on the lexicon of dueling and the defense of Cuban masculinity against Americans.³³⁷ Extending access to the bout for even illiterate Cubans, a cartoon appeared in *La Lucha* in which a rendering of Jack Johnson held the Earth on his hip while punching with the other hand. A brittle and weak Uncle Sam (*Tío Sam*) looked on in helpless disgust.³³⁸ This powerful image portrayed Jack Johnson as masculine, confident, and victorious in spite of the dominant racial norms of the United States.³³⁹ The Cuban experience of American military power and economic expansion, embodied in the invasion and occupation of the island from 1898-1902 and the second occupation from 1906-09, paired with massive American buyouts of lucrative agricultural properties and urban utilities in this period gave

portrays a cross-class and illegal engagement of the entirety of civil society: churchgoers, bankers, politicians, gamblers, and low lives come out of the woodwork for the prizefight. Central in Martí’s disdain for the event is the exhibition of greed and the omnipresence of gambling. While Martí largely condemns the entire affair as a barbaric, drunken, pointlessly cruel, and animal-like spectacle, that is “devoid of beauty or nobility,” he is obviously enthralled by the energy surrounding the bout. This, for Martí, was proof of American barbarism: “And this is a national holiday. It sets trains and telegraphs in motion and brings business to a halt for hours while workers and bankers throng the street.” In: José Martí, Esther Louise Allen, and Roberto González Echevarría, *José Martí: Selected Writings* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2002) pp. 107-15.

³³⁶ This chapter will examine some of the earliest, sporadic, boxing matches before 1910.

³³⁷ “Santiago Agramonte acepta el reto de Ryan,” *DDM*, 28 June 1910.

³³⁸ The image of “Tío Sam” in Cuba was highly ambiguous in this period. While visual reproductions in the era after Independence reflected both the Cuban “debt of gratitude” and the anti-imperialism embodied in the writings of the Cuban patriot José Martí, this particular rendering shows a feeble and helpless America, cowering from a confident, muscular Jack Johnson. The varying visual images of Tío Sam throughout Latin America after the defeat of the Spanish and the occupation of Cuba and Puerto Rico would make for revealing case study in the reactions of Latin Americans to expanding U.S. influence in the region. For discussions on Tío Sam, see: Mauricio Augusto Font, *The Cuban Republic and José Martí: Reception and Use of a National Symbol* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006); Phillip Terry, *Terry's Guide to Cuba* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin company, 1926).

³³⁹ *La Lucha*, 10 July 1910.

Cubans a firsthand knowledge of the growing power of the “Colossus of the North.”³⁴⁰ Boxing was one manner in which those emergent cultural norms were disseminated and challenged.³⁴¹

Characterizing the immediate impact of the distant event of 1910, a writer for the liberal daily *El Triunfo*, after admitting surprise that the attention of the entire country (Cuba) had been “monopolized” by “anxiety” over the events in Reno, told readers that “more than a pugilistic battle, this is a battle of the races.”³⁴² Public engagement with prizefighting was further fanned by the bold statement that “This transcendental struggle...[that reaches beyond] the natural sporting interest is much more, because Jim Jefferies is going to demonstrate the superiority of the white race, while Johnson will demonstrate just how far the potency of the black race can lead.”³⁴³

In Reno, on July 4th, while the local band played the popular “patriotic” song “All Coons Look Alike to Me,” Jack Johnson humiliated the Great White Hope, taunting him physically and verbally throughout the bout.³⁴⁴ The evening and next day after the match, in amazement, Havana newspapers reported that racial riots had broken out in a number of U.S. cities, with dozens of African-Americans killed or injured. *La Lucha* portrayed “insolent Negroes,” celebrating the triumph of the black fighter over the aging white former champion, positing that

³⁴⁰ The best account of the expansion of American capital in Cuba during this period remains Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba Under the Platt Amendment, 1902-1934* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984.) This phrase, *coloso del norte*, was used by many Latin American writers in this period to characterize the growing expansionist power of the United States, particularly its attempts to increase its sphere of influence in Latin America. See, for example: A. Rodríguez Bustillo, *Peligros Americanos: Crítica de “Ciencia Política,”* (Córdoba [Argentina]: Imprenta La Velocidad, 1899), pp. 66, 98, 175, 176, 177, 234; Javier Vial Solar, *El Problema del Norte* (Santiago de Chile: Imprenta Barcelona, 1898), p. 189; José María Zuviría, *Anales contemporáneos. Sarmiento, 1868-1874; estudios sobre política Argentina* (Buenos Aires: J. Peuser, 1889), p. 20.

³⁴¹ Pérez, Jr., *Cuba Under the Platt Amendment, 1902-1934*. Pérez’s work on the reciprocal cultural influences between the two countries gives further context, Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*.

³⁴² “La Lucha Jefferies Johnson,” *El Triunfo*, 4 July 1910

³⁴³ *La Lucha*, 4 July 1910. This article reviewed what had become familiar in the Havana press, that the legal battles to prevent prizefighting were unable to stem the enthusiasm for boxing, but that it was likely that this would be the last major prizefight to be allowed in the United States. Presciently, the writer mused that with illegality in the north, the only place left to stage such bouts would be in Mexico or Cuba.

³⁴⁴ Roberts, *Papa Jack*, p. 103.

they “seemed to think that Johnson’s victory extended to them.”³⁴⁵ This insolence, another Cuban reported, had been greater among blacks in the South. Police had been dispatched to the “black areas” of cities to prevent further eruptions of violence.³⁴⁶ In this chaotic aftermath, readers learned, the enormously valuable film of the bout was banned in the U.S., South Africa, and England because of “the fear that such spectacles promote disorders of a racial character.”³⁴⁷ South African theater owners, fearing the impact of visual reproductions of an African-descended individual pummeling a white man, uniformly refused to show the film, due to the “offensive attitude” taken on by local black South Africans.³⁴⁸ The small stage of Reno became a threatening counter-narrative to “Anglo-Saxon” dominance written large in the Cuban public sphere.

On July 9, five days after the bout, the Cuban Secretary of the Interior, López-Leiva, likely after having read reports of racial violence in the United States, ordered police to prevent the exhibition of moving pictures of the bout in theaters anywhere on the island.³⁴⁹ The government argued that showing the films would have the same effect on blacks in Cuba that it did in the United States and in the interest of “public order and good feeling between whites and blacks the pictures will be excluded, not only in Havana, but in all points of the island.”³⁵⁰ López-Leiva also reasoned that the film was pornographic, another basis for its exclusion.³⁵¹ The nascent symbol of Cuban national unity, the “raceless Republic,” was apparently not

³⁴⁵ *La Lucha*, 6 July 1910.

³⁴⁶ This article appeared prominently on the front page: “Sigan los desordenes,” *La Lucha*, 6 July 1910.

³⁴⁷ *El Triunfo*, 8 July 1910; El Negocio del cine en peligro,” *La Lucha*, 6 July 1910.

³⁴⁸ “Even in South Africa,” *La Lucha*, 7 July 1910.

³⁴⁹ *El Triunfo*, 9 July 1910.

³⁵⁰ “El negocio del cine en peligro: Temese el Enardecimiento del Pueblo.” Front page: *La Lucha*, 6 July 1910. Several racially motivated riots erupted in the United States following the announcement of Johnson’s victory over the “White hope” Jim Jefferies. See: Randy Roberts, *Papa Jack*. The rejection of boxing as pornographic will be examined later in this chapter.

³⁵¹ *La Lucha*, 8 July 1910.

sufficiently powerful to withstand such transnational images.³⁵² José Martí, the Spanish descended intellectual and Antonio Maceo, the “Bronze (colored) Titan,” had provided a potent example of racial cooperation in waging war against the Spaniards and the importation of interracial pugilism, clear in the Cuban press, seemed like retrogression. In the aftermath of Johnson-Jefferies, Afro-Cuban boxers fought each other in local theaters while white “mercenary” boxers refereed and instructed them; children held impromptu boxing matches in the street, running from the police when discovered, this was all very disconcerting for Cubans in positions of power.³⁵³

Five years later, these attempts to censure public entertainments fell apart in the face of the most famous boxing match in Cuban history: Jack Johnson lost his title (under suspicious circumstances) to a tall and awkward White Hope, Jess Willard, on the outskirts of Havana.³⁵⁴ The opposition press castigated the administration of Conservative President Menocal for allowing the bout, in clear violation of Cuban anti-prizefighting laws, and called for charges to be brought against several of his underlings.³⁵⁵ Boxing was imbedded in politics, issues of race, class, and identity.

³⁵² The idea of the “raceless Republic” was a product of the wars for independence and served as a powerful tool for nation building and also a justification for the massacre of the Partido Independiente de Color in 1912. For an account of the use of this myth in the early years of the Republic see: Lillian Guerra, “From Revolution to Involvement in the Early Cuban Republic,” in Nancy P. Appelbaum, Thomas C. Holt, Anne S. Macpherson, Karin Alejandra Roseblatt, and Peter Wade, eds., *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America* (Chapel Hill ;London: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 132-62. There are several studies on the massacre of the Partido Independiente de Color that focus on the elite (both black and white) Cuban interpretation of the political mobilization of Afro-Cubans as a treasonous violation of Martí’s vision of a Republic where race was subsumed into national identity. The most recent and comprehensive is Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886 – 1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

³⁵³ A.E. Amenabar, “Notas de Sports,” *El Triunfo*, 18 July 1910.

³⁵⁴ Johnson later announced, on a subsequent trip to Cuba, that he had thrown the fight in order to come back to the United States. Most boxing historians, and evidence from his Bureau of Investigation file to be examined later, make this claim highly unlikely.

³⁵⁵ Leon Primelles, *Crónica Cubana, 1915-1918* (Habana: Editorial Lex, 1955), p. 102.

This chapter examines the process through which boxing entered Cuban society on the margins, was the subject of official and systematic prohibitions, became a divisive political issue, and was paired with pornography as a challenge to decent Cuban society. This period, 1910-1920, saw a class-based and nationalist appropriation of modern physical culture from the United States and Europe, similar to the process in Mexico, that took place both as raffish sampling of exoticism and as part of a concerted effort by middle class reformers to control the dissemination of new technologies of physicality. As the previous chapter on Mexico has shown, the transnational journeys of boxers and boxing to Latin America were subject to public sphere debates that evinced ideas of public decency, barbarism and civilization, and the Latin American negotiation of foreign cultural norms into the social mainstream. The two Latin American countries closest to the United States, Cuba and Mexico, had dramatic experiences of American military power and culture in this period. The end of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth century witnessed the explosion of American influence in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean.³⁵⁶ The flows of culture followed increasingly connected economies, communications, and international travel. The links between individual Cubans and Americans from the lower classes forms an understudied aspect of this larger phenomenon. This chapter seeks to redress the imbalance created by a focus on the upper class, on high politics and business, to reveal an underlying narrative of cultural change.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁶ There is a massive body of literature of the military and economic expansion of the United States in Latin America during this period that focuses on the dozens of interventions between the 1890s and the advent of the “Good Neighbor Policy” under Roosevelt in the 1930s. See: Thomas David Schoonover, *The United States in Central America, 1860-1911: Episodes of Social Imperialism and Imperial Rivalry in the World System* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991). Philip Sheldon Foner, *U.S. Labor Movement and Latin America: A History of Workers' Response to Intervention* (South Hadley, Mass: Bergin & Garvey, 1988); and the now classic overview of the United States in the region., Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993). The most comprehensive history of the United States in Cuba remains Pérez, Jr., *Cuba Under the Platt Amendment*.

³⁵⁷ This attempt to envision the cultural history of Cuban and American relations as a complex, multi-class and multi-racial process follows the work of the several authors of: Gilbert M. Joseph, ed., *Close Encounters of Empire:*

The Cuban case, both in its confrontations with pugilism and in the ways these events have been treated in the historiography, however, differed from corresponding patterns in Mexico. After a review of the historiographical treatment of the “virile” sport, this chapter will resume the case study that serves as the introduction, and extend to the beginning of the 1920s, when boxing was legalized, regularized, and began its meteoric ascent to a controversial and symbolic position within transnational Cuban culture, creating real and symbolic avenues of advance for Afro-Cubans living on the margins of a supposedly raceless republic.

Obscure Beginnings, Contentious Voices: The Background of “The Fistic Art” in Cuba

Compared with the academic study of boxing culture in Mexico, even with fewer extant historical records, Cuba has received greater and more contentious attention in both popular and academic studies.³⁵⁸ Popular studies are infused by politicized narratives that divide the Cuban exile community and Cuban historians. For example, the legacy of Eligio Sardiñas is a point of heated debate: was he neglected by the Revolutionary government and left to suffer hunger and a rat infested dwelling in his old age or was he a celebrated national hero whose story illustrates the humanity and legitimacy of the current political regime?³⁵⁹ Do boxers like the three-time Olympic heavyweight champion Teófilo Stevenson represent the triumph of the amateur ideal promoted by the Revolution or was his potentially lucrative career (boxing fans and promoters

Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); and Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*.

³⁵⁸ Popular histories include: Post-1959, John Duncan, *In the Red Corner: A Journey into Cuban Boxing* (London: Yellow Jersey, 2001); Enrique Encinosa, *Azúcar y Chocolate: historia del boxeo cubano* (Colección Cuba y sus jueces. Miami, Fla: Ediciones Universal, 2004); Willy Del Pino, *Enciclopedia del boxeo cubano: con los acontecimientos boxísticos más destacados desde 1910 a 1960* (Miami: Tall. Continental Printing, 1988); Elio Menéndez and Víctor Joaquín Ortega, *Kid Chocolate, "el boxeo soy yo--"* (Ciudad de La Habana: Editorial ORBE, 1980); Julio Ferreiro Mora, *Historia del boxeo cubano* (Miami:: Selecta Enterprises, 1983).

³⁵⁹ This debate is similar to the divide among Cubans and Cuban exiles over the legacy of José Martí, both sides claim him as illustrative of the nobility of their respective political ideologies. See: Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí*.

dreamed of a bout with Muhammad Ali) stifled by the dictates of state control of the public sphere?³⁶⁰

The relative scarcity of archival sources has been a central challenge of research for this dissertation both in Mexico and Cuba. For example, while boxing was legalized and systematically licensed in both countries in the early 1920s, the detailed documentation generated by these Boxing Commissions has disappeared. An exhaustive search for these records in Mexico has turned up scattered and scarce remnants of what, collectively, must have been a tremendously rich documentary source. In Cuba, the corresponding documents were likely destroyed immediately after the Revolutionary government outlawed professional sport on the island in the early 1960s.³⁶¹ This deliberate destruction of historical records has complicated attempts to recreate an important factor in the evolution of Cuban culture during the Republican Era (1902-1959).³⁶² The early years of the twentieth century and the documentary evidence pertinent to pugilism is much better represented in Mexican than in Cuban archives despite the evidence that both countries underwent a similar expansion in both the quality and quantity of this sector of popular culture in this period. The above destruction of documents in Cuba, paired with the superior organization (in a few cases, digitization) of Mexican archives has created a much wider and more accessible documentary base. In both Cuba and Mexico, the use of newspapers and *revistas*, often the points of dissemination and arbiters of reception, are

³⁶⁰ For the best account of Revolutionary sport policy see: Pettavino and Pye, *Sport in Cuba*. For a clear example of Revolutionary hagiography see: Manolo Cabalé Ruiz, *Teófilo Stevenson: Grande entre los grandes* (Habana: Editorial Científico Técnica, 1985).

³⁶¹ Personal communication with Carlo Roig Romero, Cuban sport historian (March 2007), and Enrique Encinosa, Cuban-American historian (November 2010).

³⁶² The erasure of these documents has also contributed to the current regime's near uniform disdain for the years before the "triumph" of the Revolution. Professional sport is labeled among those many cultural factors that were limited to the decadent aristocratic and middle-classes. Though as this dissertation shows, this was clearly not the case. This narrative is particularly visible in Alejo Carpentier, "Deporte y Cultura."

invaluable. Again, the preservation of these Mexican periodical documents in Mexican and American archives far outstrips the corresponding sources extant for Cuba.³⁶³

Recently, academic historians of Cuba have begun to take up the debates posed by amateur historians to use pugilism as a revealing foil against which to examine Cuban debates on race, celebrity, and national identity. Enver Casimir's dissertation (2009) on Eligio "Kid Chocolate," Sardiñas, examines the rise of an early Afro-Cuban boxing celebrity in the 1930s, and though his insights have been valuable for this study, his chronological and thematic parameters are outside those of this dissertation.³⁶⁴ Pugilism was already an established fact of national life by the advent of the Machado dictatorship and it is that pre-1930s process that informs this chapter. Anju Nandlal Reejhsinghani's dissertation on the history of Cuban boxing (2009), while also a valuable contribution, spans the entire chronological period of the Cuban Republic (1902-1959), giving little attention to the cultural dynamics and debates that surrounded the highly symbolic beginnings of the sport and its path into *Cubanidad*.³⁶⁵ I argue that while boxing remained a highly symbolic cultural factor following its initial introduction, at no time before the Revolution was it more controversial and problematic than in the first decades of the twentieth century. Her work is also a history of boxing as a primary subject matter, a sport history. This study deepens her analysis, questioning a number of her conclusions, while viewing this complex narrative through the wider lens of gender, modernity, and national

³⁶³ The largest repository of Cuban periodical documents, the *Biblioteca Nacional José Martí*, does not allow copying or reproduction of its collection, while the corresponding entity in Mexico, the *Hemeroteca Nacional*, facilitates the digitization of its holdings. After months of research and copying by hand in Havana, all the while petitioning for more flexible access, I was shocked to see another researcher digitizing documents similar to those I had been accessing. When I questioned the staff, I was told that the other researcher was Brazilian, not American, and he was therefore permitted to digitize the documents.

³⁶⁴ Enver Michael Casimir, "Champion of the patria: Kid Chocolate, athletic achievement, and the significance of race for Cuban National Aspiration" (Unpublished Dissertation, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2009).

³⁶⁵ Anju Nandlal Reejhsinghani, "For Blood or for Glory: A History of Cuban Boxing, 1898-1962" (Unpublished Dissertation, Austin: University of Texas, 2009).

identity. For example, the introductory vignette, which evinced central and revealing debates around what I call a localized transnational event and its impact on Cuban life in the period, is absent from her sweeping treatment of the frenetic beginnings of the sport on the island. In addition, while Nandlal Reejhstinghani's chapter on the famous Johnson-Jefferies match (1915) purports to narrate from the Cuban perspective, almost all documents cited were either written in the United States or produced by American writers in Cuba, often working for the American, English language newspaper *The Havana Post*. This dissertation's treatment of the same events utilizes Cuban and American sources, while extending analysis through an examination of archival records in Cuba and several Cuban generated media texts. Semantics are of central importance, and the examination of the terms and meanings of debate are indispensable. For example, the social spaces in which boxing first gained public attention were risqué theaters that catered to a raffish urban audience. The attempts to move boxing from marginality to middle-class respectability is suggested by the spatial relocations of early pugilistic exhibitions. Reading the subtext of these subtle and not so subtle events provides context and texture to the narrative. In addition to these differences, both Casimir and Nandlal Reejhsinghani's analysis focus on bounded national case studies. A central argument of this dissertation has been that a transnational approach is key to framing the context of physical culture and boxing in Latin America in this period. Without a comparative and transnational perspective, the larger meaning of many of these debates becomes de-contextualized. The points of reference for most actors in this dissertation, be they international celebrities or the cultural manifestations of ideas about the body and modern masculinity, were almost always viewed and expressed in a comparative framework: Cubans and Mexicans debated foreign practices on their perceived merits based on their understanding of how physical culture had developed in the United States and Europe and

the role it played in those “civilized” societies (with a few examples of Cubans and Mexicans citing each other’s pugilistic experiences). The construction of these narratives in the internationally oriented press are central to understand how boxing and physical culture were localized in Cuba and Mexico.

In a broader historiographical framework, Louis Pérez, Jr.’s wide-ranging history of Cuban and American cultural relations, *On Becoming Cuban* (1999), has created the backdrop to this and many other recent studies.³⁶⁶ The introduction and nationalization of boxing, however, runs counter to Pérez, Jr.’s general framework of cultural mimesis. For Pérez, becoming Cuban was intimately tied to knowledge and emulation of American cultural norms, especially after the advent of the Republic in 1902.³⁶⁷ While sport, baseball especially, was from the late nineteenth century a clear point of cultural convergence and a loaded anti-imperialist practice (against Spain), boxing was debated as both anti-modern and quintessentially modern, depending on the cultural lens of the individual: it was not as clear-cut and innocuous as baseball and *cubanidad*.³⁶⁸

Popular culture and its intersections with race and class in the early Republic have received substantial attention in the past two decades. Robin Moore’s study on Afro-Cuban musical forms and their convoluted path into the middle-class mainstream complements Hermano Vianna’s study on the elite Brazilian appropriation of popular music in the early years

³⁶⁶ Louis Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*. A similar process of cultural appropriation is examined by Roberto González Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana: A History of Cuban Baseball*; Peter Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball, 1864-2006* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co, 2007) and Robert Elías, *The Empire Strikes Out: How Baseball Sold U.S. Foreign Policy and Promoted the American Way Abroad* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

³⁶⁷ Most elite Cubans in this period had first-hand knowledge of the United States through their education (President Mario Menocal graduated from Cornell with a degree in Mechanical Engineering) and travel. Willis Fletcher Johnson, *The History of Cuba* (New York: B.F. Buck & Co, 1920).

³⁶⁸ See: Louis Pérez, Jr., “Between Baseball and Bullfighting: The Quest for Nationality in Cuba, 1868-1898,” *Journal of American History*, 1994, vol. 81, pp. 493-517.

of the twentieth century.³⁶⁹ Jill Lane and Susan Thomas have examined the representation of race through popular theater in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³⁷⁰ Afro-Cuban political mobilization and the challenges faced by Afro-descended individuals in the realm of politics and social policy have been taken up in ground-breaking studies by Ada Ferrer, Alejandro de la Fuente, and Aline Helg.³⁷¹ Alejandra Bronfman has portrayed the impact of social science on the conceptualization of race in the early Republic.³⁷²

The study of masculinity as a process and ongoing construction in Cuba during the Republic has received relatively little scholarly attention. Emilio Bejel, examines representations of masculinity in Cuban literature and his work is one few points of reference to understand the cultural currents that defined the construction of virility, homosexuality, and homophobia in modern Cuba.³⁷³ Masculinity in Cuba has most often been studied as a staging ground for American neo-imperialism and the formulations of virile masculinity surrounding the image of the Rough-Riders, San Juan Hill, and “Muscular Christianity.”³⁷⁴ As Amy Kaplan has

³⁶⁹ Robin Moore, *Nationalising Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana: 1920-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997); Hermano Vianna, *The Mystery of Samba: Popular Music and National Identity in Brazil* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

³⁷⁰ Jill Lane, *Blackface Cuba: 1840 – 1895* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Susan Thomas, *Cuban Zarzuela: Performing Race and Gender on Havana's Lyric Stage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

³⁷¹ Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-98* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share*.

³⁷² Alejandra Bronfman, *Measures of Equality: Social Science, Citizenship, and Race in Cuba, 1902-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

³⁷³ Emilio Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). One recent dissertation takes up more recent ideas of Cuban masculinity from an anthropological angle, by studying male sex workers, or *pingueros*: Derrick Hodge, “Colonization of the Cuban Body: Nationalism, Economy, and Masculinity of Male Sex Work in Havana” (Unpublished Dissertation: City University of New York, 2006).

³⁷⁴ Peter Hulme, *Rescuing Cuba: Adventure and Masculinity in the 1890s* (College Park, MD: Latin American Studies Center, University of Maryland at College Park, 1996); Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). On modern Cuban masculinity and the connection to baseball see: Thomas Carter, “Baseball Arguments: *Aficionismo* and Masculinity at the Core of Cubanidad,” in J.A. Mangan and Lamartine P. DaCosta, eds., *Sport in Latin American Society: Past and Present* (London: Frank

argued, the 1890s saw an increased pairing of images of the virile male body and the rhetoric of nation building.³⁷⁵ Louis Pérez, Jr., following Kaplan, posits that Cuban masculinity in this period was under attack, existing uneasily between the hyper-masculine expansionism of the United States and the discredited and defeated gender ideals of the defunct Spanish empire. As Pérez observes, "...manhood implied masculinity and virility and a relationship between bodily strength and physical prowess."³⁷⁶ These gender norms ran counter to the cultivated and reserved masculine ideals and colonial domination under the Spanish. Cuban masculinity, then, evolved between colonial and neo-colonial regimes with problematic paths forward.³⁷⁷ A focus on corporeality, particularly the public sphere discussion of increasing the size and "robustness" of Cuban male children, was a central trope in newspapers, advertisements for panaceas, and public rhetoric at the highest levels.³⁷⁸

Cass, 2002), pp. 117-138; and recent study on baseball and its connection to the American imperialist mission: Robert Elias, *The Empire Strikes Out*. A telling example of this projection of American masculine imagery onto Cuba comes from the suggestively titled John J. Ingalls, *America's War for Humanity...A Complete History of Cuba's Struggle for Liberty* (New York: N.D. Thompson, 1898), p. 136, in which the imagery of boxing is employed when the United States military strikes "like the mighty fists of some gigantic pugilist against the body of his antagonist [the Spanish]."

³⁷⁵ Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture: Convergences: Inventories of the Present*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002). In particular, her chapter on the Spanish-American-Cuban War, pp. 121-46.

³⁷⁶ Louis Pérez, Jr., *Cuba in the American Imagination*, pp. 84-85.

³⁷⁷ Though the image of the *mambi*, the Cuban guerilla army during the roughly thirty year struggle for independence from Spain was clearly an important symbol of masculinity in the early years of the Republic, I argue that this was a demi-masculinity: while Cubans had fought tenaciously for freedom from Spain, the final outcome of the war was decided by United States intervention and destruction of the Spanish forces. Historians have long argued about whether the Cubans would have eventually won the war, but this is largely beside the point. American intervention and subsequent occupation creating an enormously important backdrop to the early constructions of quasi-independent Cuban nationhood, and, in following with Kaplan and Pérez, masculinity.

³⁷⁸ There are dozens of examples of the concern with corporeal size and robustness. One graphic example comes from an advertisement for "Emulsion de Scott," that ran in a number of newspapers and revistas. This advertisement portrayed the transformation of Cuban youth Francisco Maribona y Peraza from a "rachitic" and "feeble" boy to a "robust," "athletic," and "healthy" physical specimen. This "miraculous" transformation was illustrated by before and after pictures that showed a small boy wearing a suit with his arms crossed transformed into a shirtless, tubby, and confident youth. If the pictures were not enough, the advertisement was accompanied by sworn and notarized testimony from his mother (a widow) and local physician Dr. Roque Sanchez Quiróz. *Diario de la Marina*, 17 February 1906. This chapter will also examine debates within Cuban academia and the Cuban Senate on the necessity of a radical shift in masculine norms for the sake of the nation.

This chapter builds on the above cited works by utilizing a transnational lens and by arguing that race, masculinity, national identity and boxing must be viewed within the context of an early strain of globalization.³⁷⁹ Ideas of cultural imperialism, of unidirectional cultural diffusion from center to periphery, are inherently too limiting when one looks at the vigorous debates and the problematic beginnings and nationalization of this cultural phenomenon. Cubans actively sought means toward modernity that, it was hoped, would close the gap between Cuba and more “civilized” nations. This process was imbedded, as in the Mexican case, in the language of national regeneration. Cubans from across the range of classes chose which elements of *yanqui* culture they would valorize. This purportedly rational process, as we will see, was impelled forward by improvisation, as when Jack Johnson was prohibited from holding the world championship bout in Mexico in 1915 due to fighting between Revolutionary factions under Carranza and Francisco “Pancho” Villa and had to relocate to Havana.³⁸⁰ The transnational actors, both in the form of journeymen boxing professors and the Cuban encounter with controversial trends from abroad, continued in the next section, illustrate this process.

From Reno to La Habana: The Heavyweight Championship and the Controversy of Celebrity

Before 1910, there were sporadic boxing matches held in Cuba, with the first instances as far back as the mid-nineteenth century and others staged by American soldiers during the occupations.³⁸¹ These matches were oddities and received sporadic attention and little public

³⁷⁹ This argument follows the ideas of Theresa Rundstedtler in her transnational study of journeymen boxers. Rundstedtler, *Journeymen*.

³⁸⁰ For the best general overview of the Mexican Revolution see: Michael J. Gonzalez, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2002). This will be taken up later in the chapter.

³⁸¹ Carlos Reig Romero, *YMCA de la Habana: memorias deportivas (1905-1910)* (Quito, Ecuador: Departamento de Comunicaciones, Consejo Lationamericano de Iglesias, 2003) and Nandlal Reejhsinghani, “For Blood or Glory.”

response that has survived in the historical record. One exception is the scathing commentary by Raúl Mareñas, writing for *El Mundo* in 1906. Along with Cuban Army General Faustino Guerra, he was invited on board the American battleship *Louisiana* during the first months of the second American intervention.³⁸² After relaying the “bone crunching” details of American soldiers fighting each other for side bets on the deck of the ship, Mareñas mused that those who saw this as more elevated than Cuban customs were deluding themselves.³⁸³ In agreement, Enrique Fontanills hoped that when the Americans left, they would take this brutal custom with them. Until then however, there was little that could be done in the face of American power and influence.³⁸⁴ These sporadic matches were technically illegal, but under American military occupation they were grudgingly allowed. Many in the press questioned the continued prohibition of cockfighting, a “national custom,” by the provisional government when they allowed boxing matches.³⁸⁵ By late 1907, however, several theaters, such as the *Garden of Eden*, the *Palatino*, and the *Payret*, staged “simulacrum” of “American boxing.”³⁸⁶

Antonio Prieto, writing the same year that José Martí had reported on the barbarity of boxing in the United States (1882), had called for a valorization of baseball and a rejection of atavistic “pagan” sports like boxing, bullfighting and cockfighting in Cuba.³⁸⁷ As early as 1886, an American boxing instructor offered classes at the *Club Gimnástico* on Havana’s most fashionable thoroughfare, the Prado, and in 1902 a public boxing match with around five

³⁸² U.S marines landed in the Eastern part of the island in an uninvited attempt to crush a rebellion stemming from corrupt elections. Pérez, *Cuba Under the Platt Amendment*.

³⁸³ Raúl Mareñas, *El Mundo* 11 October 1906; Enrique Fontanills, *DDM*, 12 October 1906.

³⁸⁴ Ibid. Two months later, Fontanills reported seeing an announcement for a boxing match at the Eden Garden, in Havana. *DDM*, 29 December 1906. American marines also held a bout in the *Teatro Payret* on New Year’s Day, 1906. *DDM*, 30 December 1906; 1 January 1907.

³⁸⁵ Anastasio Rivero, “Comidilla,” *DDM*, 14 February 1907; “Pisto Mancego,” *DDM*, 8 March 1907.

³⁸⁶ *DDM*, 27 and 28 August 1907. The Pubillones Circus, located in the Central Park in Havana, mocked American marines by staging boxing matches, to the joy of the crowd, between two trained monkeys. *DDM*, 18 February 1909.

³⁸⁷ Antonio Prieto, “Ni gallos, ni toros, ni pugilato, (Neither cocks, nor bulls, nor pugilism)” *El Base-Ball*, March 12, 1882.

hundred people in attendance was held in the *Teatro de Marianao* (a new suburb of Havana), despite an 1899 order by the Secretary of State and Government that boxing matches not be permitted in the provinces.³⁸⁸ This prohibition, along with a ban on bullfighting under the American occupation, was similar to the Military General Order 54 in Puerto Rico (which also covered Cuba), which decreed a prison sentence of one to five years for anyone who would “voluntarily engage in a pugilistic encounter between a man and man or a man and a bull or any other animal,” and was seconded by the newspaper *Patria* which deplored boxing, pairing it with the cultural level of jerking the head off of a duck (*corrida de patos*), cockfighting, and bullfighting, all “inhumane spectacles.”³⁸⁹ Americans and Cubans were also made aware, starting the year after the invasion, that disreputable American businessmen (gamblers, bar owners, and boxers) were seeking to transfer illegal vices such as boxing and gambling to the newly “acquired” island of Cuba [See Figure 1].³⁹⁰ In 1903, Cubans read that these underworld figures hoped to hold the heavyweight championship match between Jim Corbett and Jim Jefferies in Havana, a match that eventually took place in the United States.³⁹¹

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ “Especáculos inhumanos,” *La Patria*, 2 November 1899. *Corridas de Patos* were cited as far back as the 1850s by several foreign observers as a particularly cruel Cuban pastime. A live goose or duck, covered in grease, was hung up-side down between two poles. Horseback riders would then compete to see which of them, riding at full gallop, was able to jerk the head off of the animal. This pastime was portrayed in vivid detail in Samuel Hazard, *Cuba with Pen and Pencil* (Hartford, Conn: Hartford Pub. Co, 1871) p. 538-39; and Demoticus Philalethes and Ignacio Franchi Alfaro, *Yankee Travels Through the Island of Cuba; or, The Men and Government, the Laws and Customs of Cuba, As Seen by American Eyes* (New York: D. Appleton & Co, 1856), p. 166-67. For boxing prohibitions under the occupation see: Puerto Rico, Cuba, United States, and Spain, *Translation of the Penal Code in Force in Cuba and Porto Rico* (Washington: G.P.O., 1900), p. 148.

³⁹⁰ The idea of American ownership of the island is best expressed in a massive book published that same year in the United States with a suggestive title: José de Olivares, William Smith Bryan, and Walter B. Townsend, *Our Islands and Their People, As Seen with Camera and Pencil: Embracing Perfect Photographic and Descriptive Representations of the People and the Islands Lately Acquired from Spain, Including Hawaii, [Cuba] and the Philippines* (St. Louis: N.D. Thompson, 1899). The Quaker magazine *The Friend* also surmised that late nineteenth century prohibitions on boxing in a number of states would put boxers and their ilk “in the necessity of seeking Cuba or Mexico as the scene of their degrading exhibitions.” *The Friend*, 1 June 1901, p. 368.

³⁹¹ “Pugilato,” *DDM*, 2 April 1903.

In the years before 1910, underground boxing matches, like duels, engaged elite society but were seldom commented upon in the media, aside from one example when the poet and social satirist Ignacio Rivero, writing for the conservative *Diario de la Marina*, mocked the pilgrimages to rural areas where Cubans watched the “prohibited” boxing matches like their counterparts in the United States.³⁹² Though in the aftermath of Johnson-Jefferies, Cuban authorities sought once again to prohibit the extension of boxing, these attempts failed for a number of reasons. There were ways around this censorship for creative, if disreputable, theater impresarios in the capital.

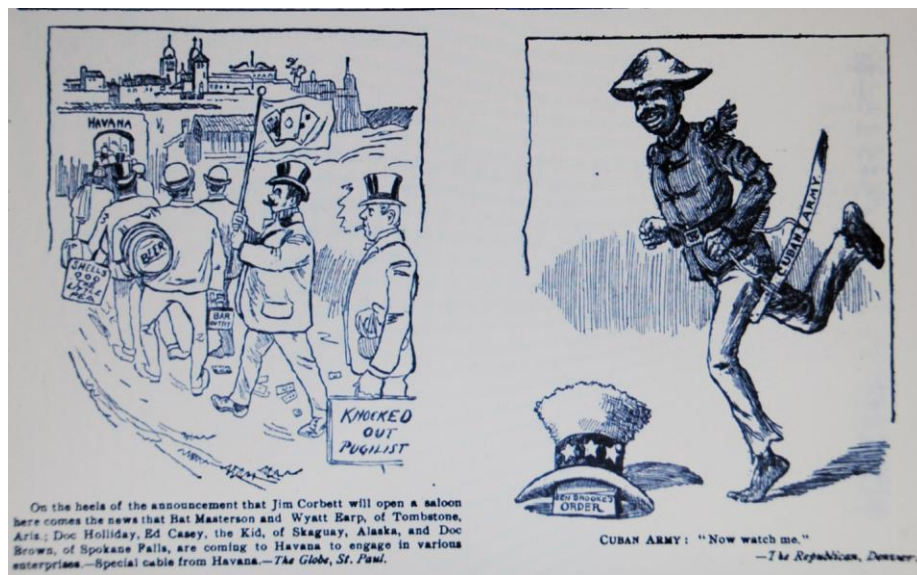


Figure 4: This Cartoon (from Havana) announces an imagined exodus of boxers, gamblers, and saloon owners (Bat Masterson, Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday, etc, from the United States to Cuba, alongside a cartoon mocking the largely Afro-Cuban Army). Reprinted from the *St. Paul Globe* and the *Denver Republican*, in *The Literary Digest*, 14 January 1899, p. 32.

Several Havana showmen, recognizing the lucrative potential of the risqué “virile” practice rushed to hire any Cuban or foreign athletes they could find, offering them positions as

³⁹² Rivero, “Pisto Manchego,” *DDM* 8 March 1907. Similar to the match earlier witnessed by José Martí, boxing matches were held in rural areas, on farms and, in the case of the United States, on river barges or ocean vessels. See: Gorn, *The Manly Art*.

performers on their staff and drawing foreign boxers from Mexico City, where the local *Ayuntamineto* had moved to outlaw boxing in 1910.³⁹³

As seen earlier in this chapter, detailed commentary on boxing by Cubans begins with José Martí while in exile in the United States, but the first sustained boxing exhibitions in Cuba were initiated by an unlikely journeyman boxer and journalist who is emblematic of the transnational beginnings of prizefighting across Latin America. A Chilean, Juan “John” Budinich, was the first individual to stage regular boxing attractions in Havana, starting in September, 1909.³⁹⁴ Budinich ingratiated himself with the Cuban public and in the highest levels of society, becoming the boxing instructor for the son of President José Miguel Gómez and training the first generation of Cuban boxers, among them the journalist and boxer Bernadino San Martín, the Afro-Cuban Anastasio Peñalver, and the Sino-Cuban Victor “El Chino” Achán.³⁹⁵

³⁹³ See Chapter One.

³⁹⁴ “Actualidades,” *DDM*, 15 September 1909; Budinich is advertised as the “notable South American pugilist,” as a business venture, he likely earned a portion of the gate receipts for the theatre. Cuban theaters charged the audience by “tandas,” or acts. Budinich would sometimes box two times per night, appearing between acts of Turkish dancers and Spanish vaudeville acts. See also: *DDM*, 23 September 1909. Budinich remains an enigmatic figure and is still celebrated in Chile as a sport pioneer of the early twentieth century. In an interview with a surviving nephew in 2008, more of the details around Budinich’s travels came to light. After sailing from Chile he landed in San Francisco and left just before the massive earthquake of 1906. He traveled by rail across the country, and later enrolled in Columbia University to study physical education. Leaving Colombia in 1907, he traveled to the canal zone where he engaged in several prizefights, most famously with the African-American (or Panamanian) Sam Odon. Budinich claims to have won 5,000 USD for this fight. The earnings enabled him to take a steamship to Havana, where he opened a boxing gym and enters the Cuban narrative. He returned to Chile by 1917, where he continued boxing and became a sports journalist, helping to promote Chilean boxing. See: Rodrigo Fluxa, “La increíble historia de Juan Budinich, el primer boxeador chileno,” *El Mercurio*, 7 December 2008. The details of this story, told by an aging relative of Budinich, have been verified through immigration documents and newspapers, with only a few errors on dates. The arrival of Budinich in 1909 clearly predates Nandlal Reejhsinghani contention that he arrived in 1910.

³⁹⁵ San Martín, *El Arte de los Puños*; Jorge Alfonso, “Centenario del boxeo cubano” *Bohemia*, 28 September 2010. Alfonso’s article (he has long written on the history of Cuban boxing) continues the mistake of dating the first boxing match on the island, between Budinich and Ryan, in 1912. This error has been repeated dozens of times since San Martín’s original mistake in dating that bout after the massacre of the *Partido Independiente de Color* in 1912.

From the date of the first organized bouts, despite the preferences of the government, interracial boxing was the norm in Havana. In September of 1909, Budinich plastered Havana columns with posters advertising his exhibitions to any Cuban or foreigner who wished to accept his challenge to box in front of audiences at the *Teatro Actualidades*. Budinich had fought African-descended boxers in Panama and Chile, and refused to draw the color line as so often occurred in the United States. The *Actualidades* was an apt choice for Budinich to introduce novel practices to the Havana public. In 1906, the *Actualidades* had been constructed as the first purpose built cinema in Havana, seeking to expand the novelty of moving pictures to the Cuban public.³⁹⁶ By 1909, when Budinich debuted in Havana, the theater was under the direction of Pablo Santos and Jesús Artigas, better known as the popular entertainment (cinema, boxing, theater, carnival) entrepreneur team *Santos y Artigas*. These two cinematic pioneers also sponsored the making of early nationalist films such as “The Mambi Captain: or the Liberators and Guerillas” (1914) through nation-wide “patriotic” script writing contests. They had a keen business sense that focused on importing and cubanizing new technologies of popular entertainment to express Cuban national identity.³⁹⁷ It is likely on their initiative and invitation

³⁹⁶ Michael Chanan, *Cuban Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 53-54. The *Actualidades* was taken over in 1909 by the business partners Santos y Artigas, who were both boxing fans and would later become well known promoters in Havana. This theatre, around the time of the 1909 exhibitions given by Budinich, also became the battleground for the competition between George Eastman’s films and those from the French Pathé House.

³⁹⁷ Richard Abel, *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 815-16. Santos y Artigas, who would become most well known for their travelling circus that circulated in Latin America and the United States, would make an interesting case study in Cuban appropriation and transformation of popular cultures from abroad. Santos y Artigas have been cited as forces in the popularization of rumba, and their park in Old Havana served as the site for important transnational events such as the speeches of Marcus Garvey. See: Frank Andre Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African-Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), p. 84. For an account of the circus in Costa Rica, for example, see Patricia Fumero Vargas, *Teatro, público y estado en San José 1880 - 1914: una aproximación desde la historia social* (Colección Nueva historia. San José, C.R.: Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica, 1996). The enormously popular circus remained a feature of Cuban life until the Revolution. The term mambí, was used to describe Cuba’s largely Afro-Cuban guerilla army on the eve on independence.

that Budinich made the trip to Cuba with the express purpose of promoting boxing in Havana as a money-making venture.

As early as 1908, the editorialist Gabriel Camps had called for the implantation of boxing in Cuba to be funded by the *Ayuntamiento* in an effort to modernize and westernize the city.³⁹⁸ Camps explained that boxing, along with cockfighting and bullfighting should not be viewed through a moral lens (he did not approve of them on ethical and aesthetic grounds), but as an established characteristic of modern nations that Cubans should emulate in order to both become modern and to make the island attractive to the growing tourist industry. Writing “as if [he] were the Mayor,” he called for “new men for new times.” Camps did not envision the popularization of boxing in theaters, but called for new public venues to be constructed under careful government regulation as part of concerted public campaign to modernize the capital.³⁹⁹

Camps’ calls to action through the popular press were seconded in the highest levels of academia. In his inaugural address to the Faculty of Letters and Science at the University of Havana on 1 October 1908, Dr. Gabriel Caruso, a surgeon, called for an emulation of physical and “corporeal” education in the United States.⁴⁰⁰ As head of the medical school, he posited that, “Today, we judge the strength of a nation through its *desarrollo sportivo* (sporting

³⁹⁸ Gabriel Camps, “La estación de Invierno: foment de turismo” *DDM*, 20 November 1908, p. 1. Camps was a lawyer and writer for several publications including *Cuba y América* and *Diario de la Marina*. During the Wars for Independence he had first been in favor of political autonomy (under Spanish rule), but later changed his ideals in favor of complete independence. Following the war, Camps tried to impel the Cuban government to pay for damages to his and other planters’ sugar plantations and also sought new streams of revenue for the Cuban economy, such as tourism. See: United States, and Robert P. Porter. *Report on the Commercial and Industrial Condition of the Island of Cuba* (Washington: G.P.O, 1898). The best work on the Cuban tourist industry, though it begins with a focus on the 1920s, is Rosalie Schwartz, *Pleasure Island Tourism and Temptation in Cuba* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰ Gabriel Caruso, “Discurso Inaugural del Cúrso Académico,” Universidad de La Habana. *Revista de la Facultad de Letras y Ciencias* (Habana: Universidad de la Habana), Vol. 7,[1908-09], pp. 209-17.

development).”⁴⁰¹ The diffusion of boxing and other sports prepared American men for a vigorous life that had positive effects, as well, on the American military and the overall *fitness* (in the Spenserian sense) of the nation. Reciting the call to action, Caruso repeated the Latin phrase most often spoken at similar events: *mens sano en corpore sano*. In his wide-ranging speech, he cited several exemplar individuals who promoted physical culture and modern manliness, from Theodore Roosevelt to Pope Pius X. Caruso’s point was clear, if Cubans did not allow and actively promote the virilization of the national body through every means available, they would slip further behind in the race for civilization.⁴⁰² Caruso demanded that educators incorporate masculine and physical education into the cultivation of students so they would be less “sterile” and “so that the graduates of our University will enter into life as disposed to fight with their intellects as they are with their fists.”⁴⁰³

The poet, Joaquín Nicolás Aramburu, disagreed with Camps and Caruso on the benefits of the new “physicality” in Cuba.⁴⁰⁴ The aping of American customs, he argued in 1907, was destroying everything that was *criolla* (native Cuban). Not only in the cities were Cubans losing the fundamentals of their (Spanish derived) culture, but even in the countryside, the *guajiro* (Cuban peasant) was taking to American fashions and modern behaviors: now “the *guajiro* also dances *two-step*, rides a bicycle, and puts on boxing shows (*hace ensayos de boxeo*).” The result of these transformations, for Aramburu, was devastating, “There remains nothing *criollo* in our distractions, and nothing Cuban in our feelings.”⁴⁰⁵ In the popular press this degradation of nascent Cuban nationhood by importing “barbarous” forms of behavior was echoed by several

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Joaquín Nicolás Aramburu y Torres, “A otras épocas...” in *Páginas, colección de trabajos en prosa y verso* (Habana: Imprenta Avisador comercial, 1907), pp. 184-87.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

socially concerned writers. Adding to Caruso's list of bicycle riding and two-stepping, a Havana editorialist argued that if the government were to allow automobiles on the streets of the capital, why not allow "the implantation of boxing," and all other things that are "prohibited" and encourage "license and gambling."⁴⁰⁶ These novelties should all be permissible if Cubans would admit, "once and for all" that they "are barbarous."⁴⁰⁷ Boxing, the "savage sport par excellence," Enrique Fontanills added, was little more than an exercise in inflated "manliness and brutality."⁴⁰⁸

As in Mexico, these debates engaged competing visions of national progress and masculinity constructed within the public sphere.⁴⁰⁹ The image of the boxing President Roosevelt, counter to the emphatic rejection of what he represented to the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío, was widely hailed in Latin America as the paradigm of modern manhood, though many commentators disagreed over the valence of the American as a symbol worthy of emulation.⁴¹⁰ As I have argued previously, there is much work to be done on masculinity in Latin America during this period. As the above images suggest, a future study might look into the multiple receptions of Roosevelt in the public sphere across the region. For example, in Buenos Aires, by 1909 there existed a "Club Roosevelt," formed by aficionados of "sport, art, and

⁴⁰⁶ *DDM*, 17 February 1906.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁸ Ironically, Fontanills was reacting to another attempt at importing barbarism, an American football match that had taken place in Havana in 1905. Proof of the stupidity of football was that Cuban women, so efficient at determining new "fashions," were repulsed by it and boxing. Enrique Fontanills, "Habaneras" *DDM*, 2 March 1905. *El Mundo*, commented that the teaching of boxing in the United States did little for the nation other than to create a future full of ruffians. *El Mundo*, 2 June 1905.

⁴⁰⁹ See Chapter One.

⁴¹⁰ Darío's poem, "To Roosevelt" is a well known denunciation of American cultural imperialism in the early twentieth century. For commentary on Darío and this poem in particular see: Alberto Acereda and Rigoberto Guevara, *Modernism, Rubén Darío, and the Poetics of Despair* (Lanham, MD: Univ. Press of America, 2004) pp. 273-280. There is much work to be done on masculinity in Latin America in general, but, as the above images suggest, a future study might look into the multiple receptions of Roosevelt across the region. Roosevelt was the justification for several government and private sphere projects; I imagine that there were at least as many that used him as a negative justification. There seems to have been few instances when his name and image arose when the commentators remained neutral.

theater...which delegated to its boxers the mission of [national] regeneration.”⁴¹¹ Roosevelt was the justification for several government and private sphere projects; I hypothesize that there were at least as many initiatives that used his image as a negative justification . There seems to have been few instances when his name and image arose when the commentators remained neutral. Despite these often forceful calls, justified in the name of national regeneration and using the images of virile transnational symbols, for an elite appropriation of physical culture, the earliest boxing matches took place in risqué theaters under private control and the globetrotting Budinich was an unlikely yet pivotal figure in this improvisational introduction.⁴¹²

Juan “John” Budinich was born in 1881 near Coquimbo, Chile and learned to box under the tutelage of a veteran Irish boxer named McDonald, while a student at the Naval School of Valparaiso.⁴¹³ He is credited with being the first Chilean professional boxer and he initiated the first matches there in 1902.⁴¹⁴ He later traveled to Panama where he boxed several times in professional matches to earn enough money to continue his travels. He voyaged to the United States in 1905 as a “journalist,” “student,” and boxer.⁴¹⁵ He enrolled in 1906 at New York’s Columbia University, where he studied modern physical education, and was required to take courses on boxing, wrestling, athletics, physical culture, and personal hygiene as part of the

⁴¹¹ *Caras y Caretas*, (Buenos Aires), s/n 1909.

⁴¹² Budinich stages several performances in the *Teatro Actualidades* in late 1909. Though he has been cited as a boxing instructor at the most elite of Havana Social and Athletic Clubs, The Vedado Tennis Club, the popular histories in which this information appears do not have citations, and I have found no evidence to support these claims.

⁴¹³ *Columbia University in the City of New York: Catalogue and General Announcement, 1906-07*, p. 359.

⁴¹⁴ Peronal communication with Enrique Encinosa, 12 Novemeber 2010.

⁴¹⁵ Budinich arrived in San Francisco, California, his first trip to the United States, in 1904, and was listed as a journalist with no friends or family in the United States. He likely made the trip across country to New York via train in early 1905 and arrived in New York where he enrolled in Columbia University. He made at least one trip back to Chile in 1908. *Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at San Francisco, 1893-1953*; (U.S. National Archives Microfilm Publication M1410, 429 rolls); *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, RG 85*; *National Archives, Washington, D.C.*; *Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1897-1957*; (National Archives Microfilm Publication T715); *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service; National Archives, Washington, D.C.*

general education toward “Making the College Freshman Strong.”⁴¹⁶ While in San Francisco and New York, Budinich was further exposed to the enormously popular interracial practice of prizefighting and claimed to have served as a sparring partner and second for the Irish-American boxer Joseph Francis Hagen, better known as “Philadelphia Jack O’Brien.”⁴¹⁷ Hagen likely encouraged Budinich in his idea to open a gym to teach boxing and physical culture, as O’Brien would later run a weight-loss clinic and write didactic books to teach “reducing” classes in New York, making a living as a life-coach based on his lessons from boxing.⁴¹⁸ After his arrival in Cuba in 1909, Budinich made for an appealing teacher of boxing and physical culture given his international matches, his association with the former light-heavyweight champion, Hagen, and his training in physical education at one of the United States’ most prestigious universities. While in Cuba, where he lived from 1909-1915, he also came into contact with the famous African-American heavyweight Sam McVea, who later accompanied him back to Chile where they staged popular exhibitions in Santiago.⁴¹⁹

Shortly after Budinich had arrived in Cuba, he published an open letter to the Cuban public in which he challenged, for the sum of six-hundred “American gold pesos,” any Cuban

⁴¹⁶ Physical education was taught under the Teacher’s College. Budinich would have had access to the specialized boxing facilities that were part of the recently constructed (1906) Frederick Ferris Thompson Memorial Building, which housed a four story gymnasium and swimming pool dedicated to the teaching of modern physical culture and hygiene. *Columbia University in the City of New York: Catalogue and General Announcement, 1906-07*, p. 132.

Also see: Leon Vandervoort, “Making the College Freshman Strong,” *Outing*, Vol. 40 (1902), p. 31-38.

⁴¹⁷ Budinich’s claimed association with Jack O’Brien is likely for two reasons. The dates and locations of his major fights for 1906-09 match up with Budinich’s arrival in San Francisco and his cross country trip to New York. It is even possible that Budinich made the trip with O’Brien. Second, all of the other data from interviews with Budinich and his family match up to verifiable events and dates. *El Mercurio*, “La increíble historia de Juan Budinich, el primer boxeador chileno,” *El Mercurio* (Santiago, Chile), 7 December 2008. Though Jack Johnson would not become the first African-American heavyweight champion until 1908, before that point several African-American prizefighters in the lower weight classes, such as Joe Gans, had won titles. See: Colleen Aycock and Mark Scott, *The First Black Boxing Champions: Essays on Fighters of the 1800s to the 1920s* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co, 2010). Budinich was also awarded a pension by the Chilean government in the 1940s as a boxing pioneer.

⁴¹⁸O’Brien should be seen as one of the early entrepreneurs who saw the lucrative possibilities of training in boxing as a general health and weight control exercise. His popular program gained the attention of Scribner’s who published his book on boxing exercise in 1928. Jack O’Brien, *Boxing* (New York and London: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1928); “Fat Women Getting Thin,” *New York Times*, 21 October 1921.

⁴¹⁹ *El Mercurio* (Santiago, Chile), 11 September 1916; 13 September 1916, 22 September 1916.

who could last six rounds against him. Given the interest of “well-known sportmen [sic]” to see him in action, he promised to give “scientific” exhibitions of the “Noble Art of Self-Defense” in the *Teatro Actualidades*.⁴²⁰ In order to educate the Cuban public and avoid the scandals provoked by an “unknowing audience,” journalists published the Queensbury Rules of boxing, which guided “Anglo-Saxons” in determining the victor in legal matches.⁴²¹ Shortly after these first scientific exhibitions, Cuban dockworkers, American and Canadian journeymen, and others put up hundreds of dollars for the first public boxing matches in Havana in the afterglow of Johnson-Jefferies.

Boxing “fever” hit the city, and spectators spilled onto the streets outside of several *zarzuela* venues in an attempt to watch interracial reenactments of the Johnson-Jefferies bout: paid actors, supposedly after reading the detailed accounts of the events in Reno, sought to imitate, blow by blow, the American racial drama.⁴²² Within days, Cubans in blackface played the role of Johnson. One observer summed up the explosive popularity of boxing in the capital thus: “Now everything is boxing, it has thrown theater impresarios on their heads. Boxing in the *Molino Rojo*, in the *Alhambra* they are screening a film about boxing and in the *Payret*, Rodríguez Arango offered the raging sensation, the *Cuban Jack Johnson*, bare fisted.”⁴²³ Suffice

⁴²⁰ Juan Budinich to Theater Critic of *Diario de la Marina*, 13 September 1909.

⁴²¹ “Actualidades,” *DDM*, 9 December 1909. The Marquee of Queensbury Rules, first printed and promulgated in 1867 in England, defined modern gloved combat (separating it from bare-knuckle boxing) and were disseminated informally and widely, often carried in print form by men like Budinich.

⁴²² *La Lucha*, 13 July 1910.

⁴²³ Like Santos y Artigas, Rodríguez Arango was an early theater entrepreneur who organized traveling exhibitions in Havana and in various points in the interior of the island. Ramón Fajardo Estrada, *Rita Montaner: testimonio de una época* (La Habana: Fondo Editorial Casa de las Américas, 1997); Emilio Bacardí Moreau, *Crónicas de Santiago de Cuba* (Madrid: Gráf. Breogán, 1972).

it to say this attracts a crowd. Say what they will, there are people who, if they could, would view these [spectacles] every day.”⁴²⁴

Little is known about this “Cuban Jack Johnson,” but he was likely a member of the *Club Atlético Cuba Fuerte* (Athletic Club of a Strong Cuba), whose members were employed as stevedores and dockworkers in the port of Havana, and which was formed to challenge foreign pretensions to physical dominance. The theater critic Roger de Lauria, writing for *El Triunfo*, while denouncing boxing as barbaric and exotic, praised the physique of the Cuban Jack Johnson as “gigantic, athletic, Phoenician [a not so veiled reference to his race].” He hoped that perhaps the Afro-Cuban could quiet the boasts of American boxers in Havana.⁴²⁵

As Susan Thomas has shown in her study on Cuban *zarzuela*, the above cited theatrical venues encapsulated the range of entertainment experiences in Havana, from the raunchy to the elevated.⁴²⁶ It is clear that boxing first entered the life of the city in somewhat disreputable venues such as the *Molino Rojo*, known as a “pornographic theater,” and paired with the popular culture exhibitions of the Santos y Artigas and Rodríguez Arango traveling troupes of actors and athletes. From the first bout, interracial boxing in Cuba was permitted, and would later become an avenue through which Cuban commentators argued that this regulated interracial combat was

⁴²⁴ These theaters, juxtaposed by the writer, represented the class spectrum of Cuban theaters in the city. While the Molino Rojo was a male-only theater that attracted the “lower elements” and was famous for its pornographic films and shows, the Alhambra was a bit more elevated and was a mainstay of the Cuban zarzuela (light opera) for decades, though it, too, was limited to an all male audience. The Payret, on the other hand, was one of the most fashionable theaters in the city and entertained men and women with a variety of shows from vaudeville to opera. See: Susan Thomas, *Cuban Zarzuela: Performing Race and Gender on Havana's Lyric Stage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness*; Alfredo José Estrada, *Havana: Autobiography of a City* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); *La Lucha*, 15 July 1910.

⁴²⁵ Roger de Lauria, “Teatros,” 14 July 1910.

⁴²⁶ Thomas, *Cuban Zarzuela*.

proof of a high level of racial fraternity that was a counterpoint to American claims to cultural modernity.⁴²⁷

The attempt to bring boxing to a more elevated and wealthier audience quickly followed the improvisational entertainments that Budnich had pioneered at the *Actualidades*. One journalist gushed with pride when an Afro-Cuban boxer named Desiderio Llanes, a stevedore, outfought the American Jack Ryan at the *Molino Rojo*.⁴²⁸ Ryan had telegraphed months in advance to newspapers in Havana that upon arriving in the port he would challenge any Cuban or foreign boxer to combat.⁴²⁹ Desiderio Llanes was one of a number of dockworkers who wrote a publicized letter to newspapers accepting the challenge as members of the aforementioned *Club Atlético Cuba Fuerte*.⁴³⁰ This group included several internal Cuban immigrants from various points on the island who had come to labor in the port.⁴³¹ Also drawing the attention of the Cuban public were improvised films showing similar interracial boxing matches. The ban on the fight films specifically stated that it was illegal to show the Johnson-Jefferies match. One quick thinking theater owner then imported a film of the 1908 Johnson-Burns contest, also interracial, and it played to sold out crowds.⁴³² Cuban sportswriters, amid these first steps toward a permanent presence of boxing among the Havana public, largely left coverage of the growing number of bouts between foreigners like the white Canadian Jack Connell and Cuban *boxers del patio* (literally “patio boxers, figuratively, “local Cuban boxers”), such as Afro-Cuban Cristóbal

⁴²⁷ See Chapter Four.

⁴²⁸ *La Lucha*, 12 July 1910.

⁴²⁹ Linares, “Vida Deportiva,” *DDM* 17 June 1910; 25 June 1910.

⁴³⁰ This club was not officially registered with the authorities in Havana and seems to have been improvised in the period around the Johnson bout.

⁴³¹ *DDM*, 2 July 1910.

⁴³² *El Triunfo*, 15 July 1910. This was the match, on 25 December 1908, in which Johnson won the title of heavyweight champion from Tommy Burns in Australia. Jack London was the most famous chronicler of this bout. Johnson’s easy victory over the Italian-Canadian (Burns’ birthname was Noah Brusso, which he changed to gain acceptance in the historically Irish profession) shocked London into rethinking many of his assumptions about white superiority in all pursuits.

Arias (Guantánamo), to the more disreputable theater columns.⁴³³ The Cuban sporting press, which normally conflated “sport” with such seemingly unrelated high culture topics as aviation and pigeon shoots (*tiro de pichón*) were unprepared or unwilling to share aristocratic space with the low-culture of boxing. The *Molino Rojo*, in the theater sections, however, widely advertised boxing matches between Afro-Cubans as part of a larger show that included a zarzuela about Cuban *mulattas*.⁴³⁴ Some sport editors were willing to dedicate space to publishing challenges from foreigners like Jack Connell and American Jack Ryan, who had been entertaining the members of the customs house quarantine by training in hopes of being released upon the Havana theater scene.⁴³⁵ Connell had recently arrived from Mexico, where he formed a part of the growing number of transnational boxers then touring the country. He left Mexico, along with his trainer, the French wrestler Fournier, due to the recent prohibitions on boxing enacted by the mayor of Mexico City.⁴³⁶

Sporting editors like Linares, to counter the popularity of professional athletes in the most “despicable” theaters, celebrated the more mainstream efforts of Cuban men to cultivate the virile masculine body through sport, such as when the nascent civic social association, the *Club Atlético de Cuba*, was congratulated on the acquisition of a new building on the most fashionable drive in the city, the Prado.⁴³⁷ The *Club Atlético de Cuba* was the first Cuban-organized athletic

⁴³³ “Molino Rojo,” *DDM*, 17 July 1910; “Vida Deportiva,” *DDM*, 13 July 1910.

⁴³⁴ One match, between cubanos de color, pitted Gregorio Herrera against Eduardo Frías. *DDM*, 17 July 1910.

⁴³⁵ Abel Dubreuil, “Sección Sportiva,” *La Lucha*, 17 July 1910. The highly sexualized representation of the mixed-race Cuban mulata was theatrical and literary trope in this period. For an account of this Cuban stock character, see: Jill Lane, *Blackface Cuba: 1840 – 1895* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2005) and Alicia Arrizón, *Queering Mestizaje: Transculturation and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006). As all passengers arriving from Mexico, Connell was quarantined to evaluate his health before allowing entry into Havana.

⁴³⁶ See Chapter One on Connell in Mexico City. One advertisement advertised him as the “Champion of Canada and Mexico,” in his challenge for the Chilean Juan Budinich and American Jack Ryan at the *Actualidades* Theater. *DDM* 19 July 1910; *El Triunfo*, 19 July 1910. The Mexico City newspaper *El Imparcial* called the movement of boxer from Mexico City after the prohibition an “exodus.”

⁴³⁷ Linares’ juxtaposition of the highly respectable middle class sporting club alongside theater advertisements for lower class Cubans clearly showed his preference and privileging of these types of sport associations. See, for

club dedicated to the cultivation of middle class Cuban bodies for the good of the nation, their motto the oft repeated Latin phrase *mens sana en corpore sano* (echoing the calls made two years early at the University of Havana for elite control and dissemination of physical culture).⁴³⁸ The club's founding coincided with Budinich's first athletic exhibitions, entering into the records of the city government as officially registered on 8 November 1909, less than two months after Budinich's first exhibitions.⁴³⁹ The club's manifesto stated its purpose as the "physical development" of masculine bodies and to raise the "sporting spirit" of Cubans.⁴⁴⁰ The founding and popularization of such clubs was an attempt by the Cuban middle and upper class to control the pace and nature of the diffusion of sport on the island. In the ensuing years, hundreds of athletic clubs were formed around social and ethnic groups such the Spanish-Cuban *Sociedad de Sports* (1910) that sought to "address the lack of care given to such pursuits [sport] currently."⁴⁴¹ Even repressed ethnic minorities sought to harness the growing popularity of sport for the improvement of its members, such as the *Club Atlético Chino*, whose stated purpose was to "bring the benefits of sport to members of our community."⁴⁴² The tensions between theatrical entrepreneurs like Santos y Artigas, who had mastered the presentation of boxing as a picaresque and racially charged pursuit on par with *zarzuela* and other marginal entertainments, and the more respectable and purposeful appropriation of physical culture by civic social associations

example, his congratulatory write up in *DDM*, 19 July 1910, in which he praises the actions of the Club "in support of the development and diffusion of physical culture...for the finest youths of the city."

⁴³⁸ The Y.M.C.A had a branch in Cuba starting in 1905, but its long-term impact was limited. See Reig Romero, *Y.M.C.A. de la Habana*.

⁴³⁹ *Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Fondo Asociaciones*, Registro de Asociaciones, Exp. 012325.

⁴⁴⁰ The C.A.C seems to have been based loosely on the YMCA, which has operated in Havana since 1905. See: Reig, Romero, *YMCA en la Habana*.

⁴⁴¹ *DDM*, 1 July 1910.

⁴⁴² *Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Fondo Asociaciones*; Leg.368 Exp. 11205, "Club Atlético Chino." This type of ethnic club, which taught self defense and Japanese Jiu-Jitsu, was likely at least partially dedicated to protecting Sino-Cubans against racist attacks like the avowedly anti-Chinese secret society Las Sombras (The Shadows), who published threatening pamphlets against the Chinese community. See: *Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Fondo Especial*, Leg. 10, No. 41. For more on the history of the Chinese in Cuba, brought primarily as laborers to ease the transition from slave labor in the late nineteenth century, see: Mauro García Triana and Pedro Eng Herrera, *The Chinese in Cuba, 1847-Now* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009).

likely pushed the Cuban government to valorize the activities of the *Club Atlético de Cuba* (by officially recognizing it) while banning prizefighting in spaces open to the public.⁴⁴³

To counter the popularity of pugilism, theaters like the *Teatro Martí* and the *Alhambra* staged original Cuban comedies that ridiculed the enormous public attention given to such a barbaric pursuits, which it labeled “boxeomania.”⁴⁴⁴ In one such performance, called *La bomba del Tío Sam* (Uncle Sam’s Bomb), the Johnson-Jefferies match was mocked alongside the many Cubans who had, with bodies “like mosquitoes” flocked to boxing as an economic opportunity.⁴⁴⁵ One Cuban observer evinced shame in the defeat of Teodoro Vives, the Afro-Cuban self-proclaimed champion of Las Villas (province): “with ‘champions’ like these, we aren’t headed for glory.”⁴⁴⁶

Despite and perhaps because of the embarrassment of Cuban fighters at the hands of American boxers, these outsiders served as celebrity spokesmen for Cuban products, becoming the first foreign athletes used to pitch products to Cuban consumers.⁴⁴⁷ Advertisers sought to catch the eye of Cuban readers by heading their pitches with “Johnson-Jefferies” and then going on to explain their products, in one case a chocolate drink, that would aid Johnson in his victory.⁴⁴⁸ Another advertisement for a lunch counter, the *Salón Bonachea* located on the Prado,

⁴⁴³ Ibid. *Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Fondo Asociaciones*, Registro de Asociaciones, Exp. 012325. By 1914, the Club Atlético had around five hundred members. This tension will be examined further, later in this chapter.

⁴⁴⁴ This comic performance, titled “Un Campeonato de Boxeo,” does not survive in the historical record beyond advertisements for its debut. One can only imagine the content of this lambast. *DDM*, 13 July 1910. *El Triunfo*, 7 July 1910, Description reads: “it will ridicule the *boxeomania* that has invaded this place, resulting from the much barked about Johnson-Jefferies fight.”

⁴⁴⁵ Roger de Lauria, “La Bomba del Tío Sam,” 22 July 1910.

⁴⁴⁶ *DDM*, 16 July 1910.

⁴⁴⁷ Jack Ryan, the American boxer, whether he was made aware of it or not, served as the example of bodily strength for “licor de berro,” the advertisement reading “The pugilist Ryan has declared that he feels stronger than ever when he drinks licor de berro.” *DDM*, 17 July 1910.

⁴⁴⁸ Add for Chocolate tipo frances y Galletas Malvert (French Chocolate and Malvert Cookies), *DDM*, 4 July 1910.

touted that the best teachers of boxing recommended that to prepare a body for combat one needed to eat at their restaurant.⁴⁴⁹

In this context of public engagement, moralizing editors like Joaquín Aramburu cast their disdain on the hypocritical permissiveness of the United States that was “infecting” Cuba. While comparing boxing to bullfighting, Aramburu argued “against [that regression], as against all regressions toward barbarity, I protest...”⁴⁵⁰ As in Mexico, writers in the public sphere viewed the barbaric cultural practices like cockfighting as engrained in Cuba by a “malevolent colonial education,” that represented “retrogression and *envilecimiento* (degradation).” Aramburu suggested the founding a “society for the protection of men” to accomplish what the “civilized nation, the United States,” was unable to prevent: “that abominable practice in which a man bloodies the face or caves in the chest of another, among the cheers of the stupid crowd.”⁴⁵¹ Against teaching boxing to Cubans, he concluded, “progressive nations cannot accept as an educative element of human instinct this savage spectacle.”⁴⁵² Another writer echoed Aramburu’s sentiments the same day, “If this is civilization, I reject it eternally...time will exercise its reflexive action and we will raise a statue to the first authority who raises his voice against the barbarity of pugilism.”⁴⁵³

Suggesting the tension between the moralizations of disgusted journalists and the public craving for information on the bout, the same newspaper that ridiculed the United States for allowing boxing carried several pictures and dozens of narratives from the scene of the bout,

⁴⁴⁹ “De Boxeo,” *El Triunfo*, 8 August 1910

⁴⁵⁰ *DDM*, 4 July 1910.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.* *Gaceta Internacional*, p. 2.

most appearing on the front page.⁴⁵⁴ The day after the July 4th bout, Aramburu continued his attack on American culture. Though there were admirable qualities in such a large nation, he argued that “none will deny that boxing, carried to these extremes, is hateful and a stain...on this beautiful civilization...without mercy, without gallantry, without beauty, without aesthetics, with no elevated end, without fundamental logic, purely primitive, negative, crude.”⁴⁵⁵ Boxing, despite the American celebration of logic and science, was the lowest element of culture. Furthermore, Aramburu chided, “In the United States, where so much racial prejudice exists, where the majority was for the white man, July 4th was a sad day for most Americans...are there any more painful humiliations?”⁴⁵⁶ Aramburu had become obsessed with the bout, writing about it for weeks and citing the nascent Cuban appropriation of boxing as the most frightful event in decades: “I fear the influence of this contagion in a servile and imitative people like my own...And I continue to reject the Americanization of our customs, so absolute and photographically as we Cubans are adepts at doing.”⁴⁵⁷

Despite the near uniform journalistic disdain for prizefighting in the United States, the theater critic Enrique Fontanills rejected the Cuban government’s prohibition of films of the bout. In Cuba, he argued, there had never been the “question of race” so “latent” in the United States. The idea that showing the film would provoke racial disorders in Cuba was only tenable, he continued, if the island were to be considered a mere “appendage” of the United States. Furthermore, the government had no right to censure businessmen and the thousands of Cubans who wished to watch cinematic reproductions of the historic event.⁴⁵⁸ Aramburu seconded Fontanills, arguing that those in the government who banned the film were ignorant of the

⁴⁵⁴ DDM, Edición de la Mañana, 5 July 1910. The description of the bout covered almost the entirety of two pages.

⁴⁵⁵ Joaquín Aramburu, “Una Manca,” *DDM*, 4 July 1910

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁷ Aramburu, “Baturillo,” *DDM*, 7 July 1910, p. 1.

⁴⁵⁸ Fontanills, “Exceso de Celo,” *DDM*, 8 July 1910.

benevolent lack of racism in Cuba, seeing themselves as more American than Cuban: banning the films showed lack patriotism. “Lynching” was American, not Cuban.⁴⁵⁹ Manuel de Linares supported these views, congratulating the society magazine *El Figaro*, for publishing “unedited” pictures of the bout and dedicating a large section to sport, which was “indispensible” for any magazine that “desires to be highly esteemed.”⁴⁶⁰

Amid this public excitement and moralizing contempt over the novel practice of boxing, on July 23, 1910, the government banned boxing, in any form, in Cuba.⁴⁶¹ On July 22, Lieutenant Herminio Inchaústegui, of the National Police, submitted a formal protest to the Secretary of Government, claiming that a boxing match at the *Payret* had scandalized women and female children and that the boxers, shirtless and in tight pants, were dressed without “due propriety.”⁴⁶² Inchaústegui was a tireless campaigner against anything that violated his particular views on morality and propriety, though rooting out boxing would prove to be a focal point of his efforts to make Cubans into puritanical citizens.⁴⁶³ Though the bout “filled the theater to

⁴⁵⁹ Aramburu, “Baturillo” *DDM*, 12 July 1910.

⁴⁶⁰ Manuel de Linares, *DDM*, 14 July 1910.

⁴⁶¹ *El Triunfo*, 23 July 1910.

⁴⁶² “Secretaría de Gobernación,” *DDM*, 22 July, 1910. The full text of the letter was printed in *El Triunfo*, 23 July 1910: “Tengo el honor de informar a usted que en la noche de ayer, se celebró en el teatro Payret, el match de 500 pesos a seis rounds concertado entre los boxeadores Juan Budinich y Jack Ryan y por la forma y lugar de su celebración donde concurren señoras y niñas, resulta ofensivo a lo moral y buenas costumbres en un país civilizado, pues ambos combatientes se presentaron casi desnudos, cubiertos solo con un pequeño pantalón, de tan cortas dimensiones como un taparrabos, presentando el Budinich aspecto de tener una pierna toda vendada, a consecuencia de tenerla herida antes de la pelea.” Inchaústegui would continue his crusade against boxing as head of the “Police Experts” in Havana, in 1919. See: Hubiera sido mas decente, mas culto, el espectáculo, si se hubieran presentado con un traje apropiado como hacen los acróbatas, y no perjudicaria las reglas del boxeo, pues realmente es, que se esta representando aquí con el boxeo una comedia; pues con los guantes que emplean, no se pueden causar ningun dano y en cambio se hace alarde de uno de los espectáculos mas barbaros en contra de la civilización para explotar el publico. Respetuosamente,

H. Inchaústegui

De orden del señor Presidente de la Republica, el Secretario de Gobernación, dispuso ayer tarde, la prohibición del boxeo, o practicas del mismo, en todo el territorio de la Republica de Cuba.” Inchaústegui would continue his crusade against boxing until its legalization in the early 1920s. See: Alfonso, *Puños dorados*.

⁴⁶³ For example, the policeman had been on “campaign” in 1909 against José López, the respected owner of the largest bookstore in Cuba *La Poesía Moderna* because some of his books imported from Spain had Spanish lottery numbers printed in them. He arrested López for violating laws against gambling. “Inchaústegui en Campaña” *DDM*, 6 April 1907. Inchaústegui would get his way after the death of Soldado Marroquín in 1919, to be examined

bursting,” the conservative *Diario de la Marina* (as shown above) feared cultural contamination and refused to cover it. Santos y Artigas, theater owners, immediately fired back, ridiculing Incháustegui for his prudery as “inspector of spectacles,” and facetiously announcing that they would consult with the policeman over wardrobes before every show, to make sure that “they were not attacking good customs or the latest fashions.”⁴⁶⁴

The new law was a direct response to the much publicized July 21 bout between the Chilean boxer Juan Budinich, and the American Jack Ryan in the *Teatro Payret*.⁴⁶⁵ Though conservative newspapers censured the theater owner Rodríguez Arango for allowing greed to trump good taste, liberal newspapers like *La Lucha* and *El Triunfo* printed every detail of the bout alongside large shirtless pictures of the boxers.⁴⁶⁶ The winner of the match, these newspapers marveled, was to receive the sum of 500 U.S. dollars (the going rate in Mexico as well). Budinich, being the heavier fighter, bet an additional five hundred dollars that Ryan would not last six rounds in front of him.⁴⁶⁷ An American observer commented with great amusement that Havana was becoming quite the center of boxing.⁴⁶⁸

later in the chapter. He was also fervently anti-working class and denounced labor organizers as dangerous elements of society. See: Héctor Díaz Zermeno *Aureliano Blanquet, 1848-1919: ¿cancerbero del traidor Victoriano Huerta o militar leal?* (México: Universidad Autónoma de México, 2004).

⁴⁶⁴ “Actualidades,” *DDM*, 23 July 1910.

⁴⁶⁵ Jack Ryan has left little trace in the historical record. He did travel between Mexico and Cuba in this period, engaging in boxing and wrestling matches. *Mexican Herald*, 14 July 1912; *Nueva Era*, 18 October 1912. There were two Jack Ryans boxing in this period, one from Wisconsin and the other from Chicago. Given the surviving records of their bouts, it is likely that the Jack Ryan in Cuba was from Fon du Lac, Wisconsin. See record for Jack Ryan the online compendium of boxing matches, <http://boxrec.com/> (accessed 14 December 2010).

⁴⁶⁶ *La Lucha*, 20 July 1910, p. 5; *El Triunfo*, 20 July 1910.

⁴⁶⁷ *La Lucha*, 19 July 1910.

⁴⁶⁸ “Sporting Havana is to be given an example of what artistic pugilism is like, and as both the goats are to be foreigners, local authorities will not be supposed to cry much if they get good drubbings. John Budinich, the Chilean, and Jack Ryan, the American are to give a boxing exhibition at the Payret theater on Thursday night for scientific points—the point being for Ryan to stand up for six rounds against his larger antagonist. Budinich is to have fifteen pounds the better of it in weight, and as he is much taker and has a longer reach than his opponent, he will have the decided advantage, although Ruan [sic] is quite shifty on his feet, Their prize is to be for \$500, and it is likely that the theater will be crowded by local sports to see the contest. Havana is getting to be quite a pugilistic center, as Jack Connell is here, and wants a go with either Budinich or Ryan. Conells [sic] at *Actualidades*,

As the day of the first professional bout in Cuba approached, readers were treated not only to images of the fighters, but their biographies and their fight records (to aid in betting). The referee was to be the well known fencing instructor from the Commercial Shop Clerk's Club (*Club de Dependientes de Comercio*), Pío Alonso, while the owner of the Sevilla Garden Hotel was to foot the bill to make a moving picture of the bout for distribution throughout the island.⁴⁶⁹ Budinich was listed as twenty-eight years old, from Coquimbo, Chile, having forty-one bouts with one loss and five ties. Ryan was twenty-two years old, from Philadelphia and claimed forty-three fights with two losses: both boxers were experienced professionals.⁴⁷⁰

Abel Du breuil, the sportswriter for *La Lucha*, shadowed the boxers around the city for days before the bout, reporting on their every move. The day of the match, he explained the scene to his readers: the *Payret*, the largest capacity theater in the city, seemed tiny compared to the crowds that gathered hours before the bout.⁴⁷¹ All the sporting associations in the city had clamored to buy out the tickets. The largest buyer was the recently founded middle-class association, the *Club Atlético de Cuba*, which had also hired Jack Ryan to teach boxing to their growing list of members.⁴⁷² On the evening of the bout, every seat was filled and spectators spilled out into the aisles. The local police tried to intervene to prevent the bout, but after being booed by the crowd they thought better of it and decided to take up "strategic places" around the theater. The boxing ring was constructed on the stage, and the entire lighting configuration was reorganized in order not to "bother" the boxers. When the crowd seemed ready to burst, the

Budinich gets mail at the Payret, while the ghost walks for Ryan at the Moulin Rouge. So the different amusement places are having quite a contest among themselves to win first honors". *La Lucha*, 19 July 1910, p. 7.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ These records were likely inflated, though both boxers carried newspaper clippings from various countries to prove their experience.

⁴⁷¹ *La Lucha*, 22 July 1910.

⁴⁷² A.E. Amenabar, "El Boxeo en Cuba," *El Triúnfo*, 21 July 1910, p. 12.

curtain went up and Budinich, accompanied by the Afro-Cuban boxer from Sagua la Grande, Desiderio Llanes, entered the ring. Ryan soon followed.

The six round bout was fairly even, with the Chilean appearing as a slightly better fighter. When, at the end of the sixth round, Ryan had not been knocked-out, he was declared the winner as previously stipulated. Du Breuil congratulated Rodríguez Alonso, owner of the *Payret*, on the nearly three-thousand dollars earned in gate receipts and claimed that the gentlemanly nature of the bout proved that boxing only augmented Cuban culture in a positive manner.⁴⁷³ This endorsement by the well known sportswriter was not sufficient to sway the opinions of the government.

La Lucha and *El Diario de la Marina* announced that boxing, including the “fake” shows given recently in the pornographic *Molino Rojo* theater, had been outlawed in a circular from the Department of the Interior and that the Mayor of Havana had followed with a similar flier.⁴⁷⁴ The new laws were applauded by theater critic Roger de Lauria, who had berated theater owners, particular those of the *Payret*, for allowing their venues to become “coliseums” of low culture that “tricked” the uneducated Havana public in barbarizing their tastes and satisfying their craving for blood. Now that the fight in the *Payret* had occurred and the government had reacted, de Lauria hoped, the “cultivated public that flees from such things,” could take back their theaters for good.⁴⁷⁵ He gushed: “With this [prohibition] art wins, and with art, Cuba, Excellent!”⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷³Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ *La Lucha*, 23 July 1910; *DDM*, 23 July 1910.

⁴⁷⁵ *El Triunfo*, 22 July 1910.

⁴⁷⁶ Roger de Lauria, “Teatros,” *El Triunfo*, 23 July 1910.

From the columns of the same daily, the sportswriter A.E. Amenabar, countered what he viewed as the shortsighted and snobbish rants of theater critics. After viewing the bout, he argued that there was no better example of the pairing of masculinity and intelligence than the well ordered match that had dominated public attention for days. As proponents in Mexico argued, Amenabar pleaded with the Cuban public to cultivate boxing:

Those peoples among which athletic exercise predominates...are prosperous and virile; because *sports* throw off laziness and imbues in men the habits of work and sociability. And I wish that in every *barrio* there would exist “out of necessity,” a [boxing] gym...where children and youths acquire physical development, where they respect and are respected by their companions, thus constituting an unbreakable bulwark against tuberculosis and other sicknesses that come from the general rule that among individuals who live a vice filled and sedentary life, their bodies become fertile ground for these evils.⁴⁷⁷



Figure 5: Gran Teatro Payret: Circa 1910, Archivo Nacional de Cuba.

As shown in the previous chapter (Mexico), the year 1910 served as a turning point in the conceptualization of physical culture as a national project initiated by newspapers, civic –social organizations, scholars, and entrepreneurs in the democratic public sphere to “virilize” and strengthen the national body. This project was carried forth in opposition to vehement objections

⁴⁷⁷ Amenabar, “La Lucha Budinich-Ryan: Emocionante espectáculo en el gran teatro Payret,” *El Triunfo*, 22 July 1910.

from influential editorialists and politicians who feared the appropriation of boxing as a symptom of the negative aspects of Americanization and the degradation of traditional Cuban culture. The founding of social clubs in Havana and throughout the island dedicated to cultivating masculine bodies paired with the enormous popularity of boxing as a means to Cubanize novel cultural currents and ideas despite these objections. The government, as shown in the prohibitions listed above, tried to resist the challenge of the Cuban public sphere. As in Mexico, this prohibition prompted entrepreneurs and athletes to travel the island in search of towns where they could convince local authorities to let them stage public matches, disseminating sport in the process. Though research remains to be done on this diffusion, the work of Enrique Encinosa (who has compiled information on nearly 3,000 boxing matches in the Republican Era) has given tantalizing glimpses into the travels of early boxers like John Budinich, who by 1911 was giving exhibitions in provincial towns like Cienfuegos.⁴⁷⁸ Despite these prohibitions, boxing continued and went “underground” in Havana. Because of its illegal status, few records remain of bouts staged at the American Club, such as that between the Sino-Cuban Víctor “El Chino” Achan and Bernardino San Martín in 1912.⁴⁷⁹ One interracial bout, which took place at the American Club in Havana in 1912, was relayed by the boxer Tommy Smith to acquaint Americans with Cuban “notions,” of how a boxing match should be carried out.⁴⁸⁰ The bout featured the “Anglo” Tommy Smith against the “negro” Mr. Brewer.⁴⁸¹ While

⁴⁷⁸ Budinich v. Modesto del Valle 1 October 1911, Teatro Terry, Cienfuegos; Budinich v. Jack Ryan 3 October 1911, Ceinfuegos. Private Collection of Enrique Encinosa.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid. The American Club opened in Havana in 1901 and served as the business and social center of the “American colony” in the city. Walter M. Daniel, *The American Club of Havana, Cuba, 1932: History, Constitution, by-Laws, Officers and Members* (Havana: Times of Cuba, 1932).

⁴⁸⁰ Undated article from the Hartford Courant (Conn.), reprinted in Munson Steamship Line, *Cuba Review and Bulletin* (Vol. 10 [March, 1913]), p. 13.

⁴⁸¹ According to Brewer’s record published in 1921 in Colombia, he had boxed between 1910 and 1921 in Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, Cuba, and the United States. He is yet another of the hundreds of African-American boxers who fought all over Latin American in the early twentieth century. *El Gráfico* (Bogotá), 1921, pp. 374-75.

Cubans knew and respected most international rules, they demanded a short speech from the boxers between each bout to which they responded with thunderous applause. The Cuban audience then, apparently, showered the boxers with coins. While Smith's telling of this story was likely exaggerated, it does show that boxing matches were taking place in Cuba, among Cuban spectators, that rarely made their way into Cuban generated texts. Their underground and illegal status accounts for their absence from Cuban documents of the period.⁴⁸²

In the space of a less than a month in 1910, boxing had moved from vaudevillian reenactments to the more respected *Teatro Payret*, located at the head of Havana's high society promenade, the Prado. The sums of money spent on tickets, placed in bets, and won by the victors suggest that boxing and the rhetoric of masculinity was entering the public sphere in Havana. Furthermore, it was estimated that there had never before been so many people in the *Payret* Theater.⁴⁸³ The censorship of public entertainments embodied in the prohibitions on boxing films could not long withstand the petitions by entrepreneurs like Santos y Artigas who had purchased the rights to show the film in theaters on the island. In 1911, Official Decree 1067 was signed by President José Miguel Gómez, rescinding the censorship of boxing films in theaters enacted in July of 1910.⁴⁸⁴ With fairly enigmatic phrasing, the new decree stated that the causes for the previous action, the maintenance of "good feeling between the races" had "disappeared," and that films of boxing would now be permitted in theaters on the island. The timing of supposedly improved race relations was ironic, given that tensions were already

⁴⁸² These matches, though difficult to confirm, were discussed by Bernadino San Martín in his book *El Arte de los Puños*, (1922). He had taken part in many of these matches.

⁴⁸³ *La Lucha*, July 20, 1910.

⁴⁸⁴ *Gaceta Oficial*, 30 Noviembre 1911, Decreto No. 1067: "Habiendo desaparecido las causas que aconsejaron la prohibición de las peleas de boxeo, y no causando daño a persona alguna que dichas películas se exhiban, pues no se trata de lucha real entre dos hombres, sino solo de la representación de una lucha por medio del cinematógrafo. A propuesta del Secretario de Gobernación. Autoriza las exhibiciones de películas cinematográficas representantes de luchas de boxeo; bien entendido que solo a las exhibiciones de tales películas se refiere el presente Decreto, y no a las de las luchas reales entre boxeadores."

mounting between the government and the *Partido Independiente de Color* which would culminate in the massacre of around 5,000 Afro-Cubans in 1912.⁴⁸⁵ The likely cause of this change in thinking was not a qualitative shift in “feeling” between the races, but a reorganization in the President’s cabinet. López-Leyva, the Secretary of Government responsible for the ban had been replaced by the pro-U.S. General Gerardo Machado.⁴⁸⁶ Though after 1911 Cubans were legally permitted to watch moving picture of boxing, the ban remained in place on “real boxing matches.”⁴⁸⁷ Cubans would not have to wait long however, to see a match that few would have predicted might take place in Havana, especially one that garnered such enormous levels of national and international attention and gave the Cuban public sphere a salient opportunity to further imagine the role of physical culture in the young Republic. Though events like the 1910 and 1915 bouts and legal actions served as points where debate coalesced around sport and nation, the project to virilize Cuban men through appropriation of sport continued on both popular and intellectual fronts.

In the early years of the Republic and until his death in 1916, José Sixto de Sola, essayist for the magazine *Cuba Contemporanea*, was one of the most prolific proponents for the

⁴⁸⁵ The Independent Party of Color was organized around specifically Afro-Cuban issues, such as the lack of employment for Afro-Cuban veterans in the civil service. In 1909, the Afro-Cuban Senator Morua Delgado passed a law banning the Party, denoting it as a “racist” organization that threatened to undermine the raceless ideals of the Republic. This ban paved the way for the violent repression of 1912. The best work on this event, by far the most violent and lowest point in race relations during the Republic, is Helg, *Our Rightful Share*.

⁴⁸⁶ Machado would become President in 1925 and oversee some of the most massive corruption and graft in Cuban history, including massive construction projects such as the *Capitolio* in Habana, famous for its millions of dollars funneled into private hands. While maintaining token resistance to the Platt Amendment, Machado was vehemently in favor of American business and investment on the island. It is likely this latter factor that led him to rescind the prohibitions on boxing films. Not as concerned as his predecessor with cultural ideas of propriety, Machado likely agreed with the pleading of theater entrepreneurs. On Machado, see Pérez Jr., *Cuba Under the Platt Amendment* and Robert Freeman Smith, *The United States and Cuba* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1960). For commentary on the transfer of power between López-Leyva and Machado, see: *La Republica de Cuba en 1909, septiembre* (Habana: Impr. de Rambla y Bouza, 1909); United States. *United States Congressional Serial Set* [iss. 6060] (Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1910); Munson Steamship Line, *The Cuba Review and Bulletin* (New York, N.Y.: Munson Steamship Line, 1911).

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, Decreto 1067.

development of athletics in Cuba.⁴⁸⁸ While paying homage to the importance placed on sport in those countries “that today march at the head of civilization,” he argued that the roots of such practices in Cuba were tied to the emergence of Cuban national identity.⁴⁸⁹ Cuban nationalists from the end of the colonial era like de Saco, Luz y Caballero, and Varona argued in the *Revista Cubana* that the introduction of baseball in the mid-1860s had spurred the development of Cuban “national sentiment,” and had directly contributed to the nationalist atmosphere that led to the Wars for Independence. If sport was a factor that made Cubans self-aware of their freedom and helped them obtain it, the expansion of athletics should serve to dignify that liberty achieved.⁴⁹⁰

In a 1914 article titled “Sport as a Patriotic and Sociological Factor,” Sixto de Sola argued that those who viewed the intellectual engagement of sport in Cuba as out of place in a review that was normally dedicated to art and politics were ignorant of the central importance of sport in modern societies. The practice of athletics and the increased “social integration” that resulted were of paramount importance for the continued vitality of Cuban nationalism. He cited a British eugenicist and an American sociologist in tandem with his personal observations on the

⁴⁸⁸ The cultural review, *Cuba Contemporanea*, was a leading proponent of progressive intellectual thought in Cuba in from 1913-1923. The regular contributors sought to address “all orientations of the modern spirit, with no other limitation than that imposed by respect for other opinions.” Ann Wright has argued that this group of intellectuals has received little attention in Cuban historiography due to their being outside the teleological Revolutionary history, or, as Wright puts it the “Unheroic Period of Cuban History.” This study looks to similar issues in the underrepresentation of this period. See: Ann Wright, “Intellectuals of an Unheroic Period of Cuban History, 1913-1923. The ‘*Cuba Contemporanea*’ Group,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1988), pp. 109-22. José Sixto de Sola, like many elite Cubans of this era, had received most of his formal higher education in the United States. This experience led him, through his writing and his social activism, to try and incorporate the benefits of American culture in Cuba while maintaining Cuban national identity. An ardent internationalist intellectual, Sixto de Sola was also an fervent Cuban nationalist. For many intellectuals of his ilk, these identities were not in opposition. On Sixto de Sola see Louis Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999). For a brief biography of Sixto de Sola see: Carlos de Velasco, *José Sixto de Sola* (Habana: Imprenta. “El Siglo XX,” 1916).

⁴⁸⁹ José Sixto de Sola, “El deporte como factor patriótico y sociológico,” *Cuba Contemporánea* 5 (June 1914): 121–29. This argument has been seconded by several historians, see see Louis Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*; and Roberto González Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Sixto de Sola, p. 125.

ameliorative effects of sport in Cuban society.⁴⁹¹ He further contended that organizations that developed around a common interest in sport brought together segments of Cuban society that would otherwise be in opposition. At baseball games, Liberals and Conservatives put aside their politics, rich and poor comingled.⁴⁹² Cubans who witnessed the triumph of other Cubans, regardless of race and class, were invariably proud. Even though they might not have any direct part in the victory, the atmosphere of Cuban excellence, especially over a foreign team, was near euphoric. He asked, “What is it that produces enthusiasm so intense, so delirious, so unanimous? Ah! It is national sentiment. All are Cubans and they feel Cuban.”⁴⁹³ Amid this project of national regeneration and cohesion, Jack Johnson and the shadow of race war once again captivated public discourse on the island.

The “Bad Nigger” in Havana: The Transnational Spectacle of Race and Boxing

On April 5, 1915, Jack Johnson stepped into the new boxing ring constructed on the racetrack of the American-owned Oriental Park in a suburb of Havana. Enrique Díaz Quesada, the early producer of patriotic Cuban films, stood ready at his camera on a platform above the audience, filming the bout for distribution in Cuba and beyond. He had agreed to go into business with Johnson and share the profits from the film.⁴⁹⁴ Afro-Cubans, called to action by a

⁴⁹¹ These quotes came from British eugenicist A.F. Tredgold and American sociologist Franklin Giddings, both articles had appeared in translation in earlier editions of *Cuba Contemporanea*.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., p. 128: “Que es lo que produce entusiasmo tan intenso, tan delirante, tan unánime? Ah! Es el sentimiento nacional. Todos son cubanos y se sienten cubanos.”

⁴⁹⁴ Fresh off his nationalist film making projects, this was one of two films that Díaz Quesada made in Cuba that year; the other being a film on ideal Cuban womanhood, “La manigua ó la mujer cubana.” Chanan, *Cuban Cinema*. Díaz Quesada had also made such films as “A Tourist in Havana” (1908) in which he sought to tap an international audience by producing idealized views of Havana to attract American tourists. The filmmaker would have known of the popularity of boxing films in Cuba after 1910 tried to tap into that market in collusion with Santos y Artigas who had agreed to display the moving picture in their theaters. The film of the bout, however, did not turn out well

local black politician, Eligio Madán, waited in anxiety to hear news of what heights Johnson could bring “black reality.” Twenty-six rounds later, the seven year international search for the Great White Hope was over. Jess Willard, a tall and awkward “cowboy” from Kansas had upset the thirty-seven year old champion. White Americans and many white Cubans glorified in the victory, which produced one of the most famous pictures of early twentieth century sport [see Figure 4]. Before the bout started, many Cubans in the crowd waived white flags to show their support for the white challenger.⁴⁹⁵



Figure 6: Johnson-Willard, 5 April 1915, *Archivo Nacional de Cuba*. This photograph, with Johnson shielding his eyes from the sun, later became fodder for Johnson’s claims that he had thrown the fight in order to receive safe passage back to the United States. He argued that the action of raising his arms proved that he was not unconscious.

because Díaz Quesada did not have access to a telephoto lens. John King, *Magical Reels: A History of Cinema in Latin America* (New York, NY: Verso, 2000); Cinemateca de Cuba and Reynaldo González, *Coordenadas del cine cubano* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2001).

⁴⁹⁵ Roberts, *Papa Jack*, p. 201.

The Johnson-Willard bout of 1915 has received its due amount of historiographical attention from historians of the United States.⁴⁹⁶ It would not be a stretch to argue that this event and the convoluted career of Jack Johnson serves as an epoch defining moment in American racial and cultural history. As shown earlier in this chapter, Cuban commentators, from short story writers, journalists, poets, and boxers from distant points on the island also focused on the bout as an emblematic moment in Cuban-American relations. This section breaks new ground not by recounting the well known career of Jack Johnson, but in gauging his reception in Havana, especially for Afro-Cubans, based on the previously explained events of 1910, when Cuban attitudes toward cultural novelty were placed in sharp relief by the first professional boxing matches on the island. In that context, Cuban journalists spoke to fellow Cubans in the public sphere about events unfolding in distant Reno (and immediately afterwards in Havana). In 1915, Cubans were aware that the eyes of the world, especially the United States, focused on the capital city as backdrop for foreign racial drama. In order to understand the events of April, 1915, tracing the journey and reception of Jack Johnson and his entourage from Europe to Argentina to Cuba gives important insights into the forces behind the transnational movement of boxing culture in Latin America during this period. A basic understanding of the biography of Jack Johnson aids in interpreting the events of 1915; but this section eschews the often short-

⁴⁹⁶ Jack Johnson was one of the best documented African-Americans of the early twentieth century. In addition to a handful of autobiographical works, Johnson was the subject of literally thousands of pages of newspaper coverage around the world. Despite this enormous coverage, the details of Johnson's life are often difficult to pin down. As a consummate vaudevillian, Johnson treated interviews like his theatrical audiences, often exaggerating or making up stories that had little basis in reality. For example, in his 1928 autobiography, he claimed to have fallen from a ship in the Atlantic as a youth and to have wrestled a shark over twenty feet in length. Johnson's exaggerations, however, made for great copy, and assured him front page coverage nearly everywhere he went. Among the hundreds of books that mention, in varying degrees of detail, this bout: Roberts, *Papa Jack*; Geoffrey C. Ward, *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006); Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*; Jerome Charyn, *Gangsters and Gold Diggers: Old New York, the Jazz Age, and the Birth of Broadway* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005); Henry Louis Gates, *African-American Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Marianne Doezema, *George Bellows and Urban America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Grant Farred, *What's My Name? Black Vernacular Intellectuals* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Alwyn Barr, *Black Texans: A History of African-Americans in Texas, 1528-1995* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996).

sighted biographical treatments of Johnson in an attempt to see these events through Cuban eyes. Johnson the vaudevillian entertainer was often given to exaggeration, but these exaggerations formed the basis for the public's understanding and engagement of the image created by the press and by Johnson. The focus of the remaining pages will be on the immediate impact of the 1915 bout in Havana: the construction of new boxing venues, the attempts by American entrepreneurs to foment Cuban engagement with boxing, Johnson's interaction with Afro-Cubans and the working class, and the how Cubans attempted to situate these frenetic attempts within Cuban national identity and relations with the United States.

On December 14, 1914, Jack Johnson disembarked from the Dutch steamer *Lusitania* in the port city of Santos, Brazil, after a two week's voyage across the Atlantic.⁴⁹⁷ Though he did not know it at the time, his eventual destination would be Havana, Cuba. Over the previous two years in self-exile, he had boxed or performed on stage in several countries in Europe and Czarist Russia.⁴⁹⁸ Johnson's world travels had begun in 1908 when he became the first African-American to win the heavyweight boxing championship title from Tommy Burns in Sydney, Australia.⁴⁹⁹ Since that time, the black champion had been the focus of an often frantic search for a white man who would be capable of taking back the title of white supremacy in the ring. With no successful opponents on the horizon, the Bureau of Investigation was ordered to find anything for which Johnson could be imprisoned. In late 1912, the Federal government trumped up charges that Johnson had transported a white woman across state lines for "immoral purposes," and sentenced him to a year in prison. Though he later married the same woman, he

⁴⁹⁸ Ward, *Unforgivable Blackness*.

⁴⁹⁹ The loss of the title and its impact on American thinking was distilled in the writings of Jack London, who covered the bout in Australia for several American publications. See, for example, "Jack London Describes the Fight and Jack Johnson's Golden Smile," *The San Francisco Call*, 27 December 1908. For commentary on the impact of this bout on London's racial ideas see: Jeanne Campbell Reesman, *Jack London's Racial Lives: A Critical Biography* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), pp. 184-92.

was found guilty of promoting her for prostitution.⁵⁰⁰ The Bureau of Investigation would continue to shadow Johnson for nearly a decade in exile.⁵⁰¹

Johnson skipped bail disguised as a Negro League baseball player and fled a one-year sentence for violation of the Mann Act, popularly known as the “White Slave Traffic Act.” In prewar Europe, Johnson found a ready audience for his boxing exhibitions and vaudeville acts and, for a time, his stage career provided him with a comfortable living. A combination of the outbreak of World War I, increasingly unpleasant brushes with European authorities, and an offer from promoter Jack Curley for a lucrative defense of his heavyweight title in Mexico, led him to leave Europe in search of more stable and lucrative venues.⁵⁰² With increasingly bad prospects in Europe, Johnson and the dozens of other boxers who made a living as performers, fighters, and “boxing professors” had to look for work in the safer confines of the western hemisphere. On November 20th 1914, in London, Johnson signed to fight Jess Willard

⁵⁰⁰ Roberts, *Papa Jack*.

⁵⁰¹ Though it is outside the parameters of this study, work remains to be done on Johnson’s interaction with the Bureau. His lengthy file contains dozens of correspondences between the State Department and various diplomatic posts around the world. These documents were obtained by FOI request from historian Randy Roberts and are housed: *National Archives, College Park*: General Records of the Department of Justice, File 164211, Record Group 60. These records show an unnamed agent tailing Johnson while in Havana.

⁵⁰² Johnson demanded a minimum of \$30,000 to put his title on the line. Since bouts between two black fighters were unlikely to generate the same revenues as an interracial bout for the championship and Johnson refused to risk the title for smaller sums; a bout between Johnson and the several other top black heavyweights of the era was a virtual impossibility. See: Randy Roberts, *Papa Jack*. Jack Curley (born Jacques Armand Schuel) was emblematic of early sport promoters in the United States. After the Johnson bout he was slowly edged out of boxing by more ruthless promoters like Tex Rickard, who had promoted the Johnson bout of 1910. When he died in 1937, *Time Magazine* wrote that he had had a hand in too many famous ventures to count: bullfighting, Rudolph Valentino, Georges Carpentier, William Jennings Bryan, Bill Tilden, dance marathons, and the U.S. tour of the Vatican Choir, to name a few. *Time*, 19 July 1937. Curley maintained a number of unlikely friendships throughout his peripatetic career, including with Eugene V. Debs, to whom he sent pictures of important prizefighters to and remained, in the words of Debs, a “staunch friend.” Curley also was a recipient of the anti-Semitic tirades of Henry Ford. Who labeled him as another Jew taking Gentile money and turning prizefighting into a disreputable and dishonest Jewish venture. For dedicated a section of his autobiography to Jews and prizefighting, called “Jews Get Gentile Money at Fights.” See: Eugene V. Debs and J. Robert Constantine, *Letters of Eugene V. Debs* (Urbana, Ill: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1990), p. 14.; J. Martin Miller and Henry Ford, *The Amazing Story of Henry Ford, The Ideal American and the World’s Most Famous Private Citizen* (Chicago: M.A. Donohue & Co, 1922), pp. 197-200.

somewhere in Latin America.⁵⁰³ Willard, the “Pottawatomie County Kansas Giant,” was the most promising of the “Great White Hopes;” but few gave him much of chance as long as Johnson was even a shadow of his former self.

The would-be location of the proposed bout was necessarily uncertain: the promoters had to find a locale where a large enough fan-base would make the fight profitable and in a country where Johnson would be granted entry. Before the match was to take place in February or March of 1915, Johnson would make a theatrical and boxing tour of South America to test the waters for the future of prizefighting in the region. Johnson intended to travel north from Buenos Aires with his wife, cousin, and a few hangers-on he met along the way. He did his research ahead of time and made sure that the countries where he landed had to extradition treaties with the United States that would apply to his fugitive status and violation of the Mann Act. The tour was to end with a defense of his title in Juárez, Mexico, just across the U.S. border from El Paso, from where he hoped to return to France and, it imagined in the public imagination, become a farmer. In Mexico, the fight promoters hoped, a large enough crowd from the United States would cross the border to watch Johnson, the fugitive, take on Jess Willard who would train in El Paso and Juárez in preparation.

Johnson, always in search of opportunities to fund his extravagant tastes, had also agreed with New York promoter Billy Gibson to meet another African-American heavyweight, Sam McVea in Havana, Cuba in March.⁵⁰⁴ Accordingly, he left a Europe on the verge of world war to entertain, travel, and, vague rumors had it, become a permanent resident in one of the many

⁵⁰³ As the writer “Left Hook,” mused for the Tacoma Times, the prospects of Willard to take back the title from the “ebony battleship” were not promising: “Is Big Jeff a Big Enough Man to Capture the World’s Title?” *Tacoma Times*, 24 November 1914.

⁵⁰⁴ *The Freeman*, 28 November 1914.

rapidly modernizing cities of Latin America.⁵⁰⁵ In late November, he bought passage from London to Buenos Aires aboard the Dutch steamship *Zeelandia*. While the months between his leaving Europe and the match in Havana warrant further study, a few anecdotes from his reception in Buenos Aires illustrate similar reactions to what Johnson would later experience in other parts of Latin America.

The excitement that the arrival of Johnson aroused in Argentina generated satirical responses from social critics who bemoaned the celebration of brute force over calm reflection. Boxing (black boxers in particular), and the “extreme emotions” that went along with it and them were a danger to what one writer deemed the “peaceful environment” of the port city. A drawing of Jack Johnson’s face, smiling to emphasize his golden teeth, was superimposed above a warning in *La Critica*: “At least we hope that feverous enthusiasm for the sport that Johnson cultivates will not carry us to the deplorable extremes of the descendents of Linch [sic].”⁵⁰⁶ Johnson, the “glory of his black race,” carried the stigma of racial violence that threatened to convert Argentines into their violent counterparts in the United States.⁵⁰⁷

Much of the coverage on Johnson in Buenos Aires went beyond the details of where and when he appeared on stage. Journalist commented on incidents that had little to do with boxing.⁵⁰⁸ During his short stay in Buenos Aires, Johnson’s celebrity furnished opportunity for political satire. In the night after his press interview at the Casino Theater, Johnson nearly frightened to death an elderly Argentine Minister from the provinces. It happened that Johnson

⁵⁰⁵ Johnson entertained the idea of becoming a citizen of Cuba. He remembered his time there fondly, despite the ubiquitous legal difficulties. He met and befriended President Mario Menocal and made a gift of the medicine ball he used while training to the president’s son. As will be explained later, Menocal’s relation to Johnson on the level of high politics differed greatly from his personal relationship. Jack Johnson, *In the Ring and Out*.

⁵⁰⁶ *La Crítica*, 21 December 1914.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁸ *La Crítica*, 23 December 1914.

was lodged in the same hotel and when the elderly minister emerged from his room to use the bathroom late in the evening he encountered Johnson returning from a night at the bar in the dim gas light of the hallway. The minister was threatened by the large black figure with shining teeth and screamed loud enough to wake the guests and staff of the hotel. Johnson, one reporter posited, must have been mistaken for a “Mandinga,” or a “devil.”⁵⁰⁹ The minister, referred to as “*el viejito Ortiz (the little old man Ortiz)*” was chided as hopelessly old fashioned and out of touch with modern life. Not only did he prefer life in the country and was uncomfortable in the city, he didn’t even know who Jack Johnson was.

On the 26th of December, Johnson made his Buenos Aires debut at the Casino Theater.⁵¹⁰ His performance in front of the “numerous boxing fans” consisted of exercises with a medicine ball, shadow boxing, and a demonstration of different punches with a partner. Due to legal prohibitions on boxing enacted by the municipal government of Buenos Aires and the lack of a suitable opponent, the show was limited to these rather tame enactments. One fan, disappointed by what he saw as the third rate performance of Johnson wrote an open letter to the boxer. In it he explained how he had followed Johnson’s career in the U.S. and Europe through the cables and had watched films of his matches. The author envied the champion for his luck, his achievements, and his money. When the boxer appeared at the Casino Theater this fan applauded him, further admiring his musculature and physical presence.⁵¹¹ In one the mainstays

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ The Casino Theater was one of the largest and most modern in the city. It had staged a few boxing matches, on the margins of legality, by 1914. It had been completely remodeled in 1903, “in the American fashion,” and to imitate the “largest theaters of Europe.” “La transformación de un teatro en 16 horas,” *Caras y Caretas* (Buenos Aires), 14 November 1903.

⁵¹¹ The Casino Theater, where Johnson performed nightly as part of a variety show, was associated with the cutting edge in “modern” entertainment in Buenos Aires. Daily coverage of the various theatrical venues placed the theater in a category of its own, outside the normal classification that fit most other theaters. The managers of the Casino had been among the first to recognize and promote the possibilities of moving picture in the late 1890s. Johnson, as representative of the thoroughly modern spectacle of boxing, was certainly consistent with the type of

of his performance and the climax of his act, Johnson hit an inflated bag with enough force to sever the chord and send it flying into the crowd. Despite the excitement stirred by his finale and the ovation of the two thousand Argentines in attendance, the author of the letter felt cheated.⁵¹² It was a question of respect. Johnson, the letter-writer contended, treated Argentines as an inferior audience and, by extension, an inferior people. His voyage to and presence in Buenos Aires, after European audiences were “tired of being happy about having the terrible negro,” among them, was like a charitable offering.⁵¹³ The image of Johnson created by the press and moving pictures was far from reality as experienced at the Casino Theater. Giving vent to his dissatisfaction with seething satire, the author ended by informing Johnson that he had proved himself to be “just like a negro.”⁵¹⁴

A subsection of the *porteño* press used the opportunity of his stay in the capital to hold forth on the dangers of what Johnson, the man, and boxing in general represented. These themes were laid-out in the familiar terms of barbarity versus civilization and culture that pervaded the Latin American public response to boxing in the period.⁵¹⁵ The socialist daily *La Vanguardia* dedicated space on the front page to ask if such disreputable entertainments had a place in a modern city that represented the “times of culture and progress.”⁵¹⁶ In an article titled “The Boom Times for Barbarism” the author impugned those who attended boxing matches, asserting

entertainments routinely offered at the Casino. See: Ella Shohat and Robert Stam. *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003), p. 113.

⁵¹² *La Crítica*, 27 December 1914.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁵ The Argentine public had recently been introduced to boxing via abundant press coverage and sporadic local initiative. As in the rest of Latin America, organized sport, including boxing, began to spread beyond elite and foreign circles. The earliest known practice of boxing in Argentina date from the 1890s. The first professional bout took place in 1903 between an Irish and Italian immigrant. The Irishman, Paddy McCarthy, later started the first boxing academy in Argentina. See: Robert G. Rodríguez, *Regulation of Boxing: A History and Comparative Analysis of Policies Among American States* (Jefferson: Mcfarland, 2008), pp. 163-190.

⁵¹⁶ *La Vanguardia* (Buenos Aires), 10 January 1915, p. 1.; “Hoy desmentiremos, con el auspicio oficial, nuestra cultura de gran ciudad y sentiremos el precedente funesto de glorificar la barbarie.”

that the crowd in attendance proved itself more “atavistic” than the boxers. The enthusiasm for shows of “muscular force,” was more debasing than the behavior of those who profited by it. For some time, Argentines had had to countenance those muscular gangsters (*patoteros de buen tono*) who exalted the cult of physical force over reflection; the popularity of boxing though, was cause for alarm. The author ended by bemoaning the damage to Argentine culture: “Today we will debase ourselves and the culture of our great city under official auspices [the *Ayuntamiento* had granted Johnson an unusual license to stage boxing matches], and seat ourselves before the disastrous precedent of glorifying barbarity.”⁵¹⁷

Johnson, as he had many times before, served as a mirror for the construction of local identities, and was represented as a cultural contagion in Argentina. As he arrived in Cuba, much of this discourse, under the pressure of international attention, was subsumed by the immediacy and the excitement of having so many foreigners and international celebrities in the city at once. Journalists likely slept little as they hurried to cover every detail, leaving little time to reflect about the impact on Cuban civilization that had been such a clear impulse in the years before.

Havana as an Unlikely Stage: Improvisation, Betrayal, and Race War

Hundreds and later thousands of journeymen pugilists, American and Cuban socialites, gamblers, and fight fans packed the hotels, cafes, and bars of Havana in March of 1915. The nascent Havana sporting press scrambled for opinions, took offense, and gloated over how far Cuba had come in the eyes of international public opinion. President Menocal attended the

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

training camps of both Johnson and Willard, bet on the victory of the black champion, and declared the day of the fight a public holiday so that Cubans could “see the scientific exchange between the challenger Willard and the Colossus Johnson.”⁵¹⁸ Congress shut down, public transport was rerouted to the suburb of Marianao, and Menocal cancelled his plans so that he could attend the fight, sitting with his entire cabinet in a specially constructed box.⁵¹⁹ Special “Panama Suits” were advertised on Obispo Street to keep spectators cool and fresh during the match.⁵²⁰ Amazed at the size of Jess Willard (he stood six feet six inches), as he strode the streets of Havana, “causing little earthquakes,” the press headlined his biography by quoting him: “I’ve come to Havana to destroy that negro.”⁵²¹

Amid the general excitement, however, many commentators lamented that such a depraved show was being allowed to take place. It was an example of Cuba’s moral and “intellectual backwardness” that would stigmatize them in the eyes of more civilized nations. Boxing, along with bullfighting, belonged to a more primitive age.⁵²² Both boxers, the black and the white, were equally barbarous. The United States, which had shared with Cuba so much of the “light of civilization,” was now sending to Cuba, in the form of boxing, the refuse of its culture.⁵²³

Amid this media uproar, American entrepreneurs paired with Cuban “sportmen” to transform some of the most visible public spaces into venues for prizefighting. The Jewish-

⁵¹⁸ *El Mundo*, 29 March 1915.

⁵¹⁹ *El Día*, 2 April 1915; *El Día*, 6 April 1915.

⁵²⁰ *El Día*, 3 April 1915.

⁵²¹ Jess Willard, *El Heraldo de Cuba*, 17 March 1915. Jess Willard often repeated the story of his beginnings as a boxer. After Jim Jefferies had suffered such an ignominious defeat at the hands of Johnson in 1910, he had taken up boxing in Kansas with the express intent winning back the title for white manhood. *El Paso Herald*, 6 April 1915; *The Washington Herald*, 6 April 1915; “Life and Career of Our New Champion,” *Tacoma Times*, 6 April 1906 (this article also called, ironically, for a search for the new “black hope.” Roberts, *Papa Jack*).

⁵²² Message from “Hermano Juan [sic] Ryan” *El Día*, 4 April 1915.

⁵²³ *El Día* “La Nota del Día,” 5 April 1915.

American financier and editor of *The Havana Post*, George M. Bradt, constructed a boxing arena on the grounds of the *Parque Maine* at the entrance to the wealthy suburb of Vedado. The park that served as the monument to American soldiers who had died at the beginning of the Spanish-American war, Bradt hoped, would become the venue to popularize boxing on the island. It would also serve as a site where Americans would reenact some of the most blatantly racist entertainments that had fallen out of favor in the United States.⁵²⁴

Just two miles away on the border between Old and Central Havana, John Robinson, an American and head of publicity for Johnson-Willard, partnered with Abel Du Breuil, the sports editor of liberal daily *La Lucha* to open the *Colón Arena*.⁵²⁵ This outdoor boxing arena and café was located on the same lot as the *Teatro Martí*, on the corner of *Zulueta y Dragones*, where in 1910 Cuban playwrights had presented original plays that mocked the “boxeomania,” then prevalent in Havana. This new venue also promised to popularize the sport and to host a championship among the many amateur athletic clubs, including the *Club Atlético de Cuba* and the *Vedado Tennis Clubs* that had taken root across the city in the past few years.⁵²⁶ The Colón’s

⁵²⁴ There is a substantial historiography on comparative race relations in the United States and Cuba during the period of the Republic (1902-1959). Most of this research has argued that in Cuba the lack of legal segregation, the law of universal male suffrage, and the cross-racial experience of the Wars for Independence led to more flexible racial norms than, for example, in the U.S. South. See: Aline Helg, “Black Men, Racial Stereotyping, and Violence in the U.S. South and Cuba at the Turn of the Century,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 42, No. 3, (Jul: 2000), pp. 576-604. Most of these studies have focused on the epoch defining massacre of the Partido Independiente de Color in 1912 to argue that whatever fantasies of racial inclusion elite white and Afro-Cubans might have had this event clearly displayed the fear, hatred, and inequality imbedded in Cuban society. See: Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), and: Aviva Chomsky, “Barbados or Canada?” Race, Immigration, and Nation in Early-Twentieth-Century,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 80, No. 3 (Aug., 2000), pp. 415-462. This studies commonly focus on moments of rupture to illustrate daily lived realities. This paper, in contrast, focuses on debates surrounding incremental change and daily life to flesh out the quotidian functioning of Cuban society. As Milton Friedman has argued, “Only a crisis-real or perceived-produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around.” (cited in Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 2007).

⁵²⁵ On the longstanding liberal editorial stances of the *La Lucha* see Irene Fonte, *La nación cubana y Estados Unidos*.

⁵²⁶ There were dozens of athletic clubs, the most important of which was the Club Atlético de Cuba (opened in 1909) that competed in an array of athletics and also served as social clubs for a cross-class group of Cubans. The

easy accessibility, near Central Park and the confluence of all streetcar lines made its location ideal. From the beginning, it promised to be more attuned to Cuban sensitivities than the Stadium. Not only would it hold professional matches for the “popular prices” of fifty cents, it would also serve the community by organizing an amateur championship for the local sport clubs.⁵²⁷

The most visible new construction that resulted from the boom of boxing and physical culture in Havana was the 15,000 seat “Estadio de Havana” (Stadium), funded by George M. Bradt and built the grounds of the Maine Park.⁵²⁸ Located on the *malecón* (sea front drive) at the entrance to the wealthy Havana suburb of *El Vedado*, Cuba’s first venue dedicated to boxing soon attracted curious observers in the thousands. Bradt was not the most principled person to introduce the Havana public to interracial boxing. He was, according to the NAACP, a force for evil in the fight for equal rights for African-Americans.⁵²⁹ He was a “wild animal” sent abroad by the government of the United States to represent them. From the pages of his newspaper, Bradt fulminated against the members of the Afro-Cuban *Ateneo* who had the audacity to compare Toussaint L’Ouverture with George Washington. L’Ouverture, Bradt seethed, “was just a bad nigger who ran amok in Haiti.” He was a “born slave” who showed his “slavish streak” by betraying his French masters. The general was no better than Evaristo Esténoz (a

records can be found in the *Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Fondo Clubes y Asociaciones*. Hereafter cited as “ANC, *Fondo Asociaciones*.”

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

⁵²⁸ This park would later be turned into a formal monument to American sailors killed by the explosion aboard the Battleship Maine in 1898. The construction of the monument was undertaken during the presidency of Gerardo Machado, and was dedicated in 1928 (see: Emeterio Santiago Santovenia y Echaide, *Libro conmemorativo de la inauguración de la Plaza del Maine en la Habana* (La Habana: Secretaría de Obras Públicas, 1928). The large marble columns, which still stand, used to have an open-winged bronze eagle atop them. The eagle was removed after the Cuban Revolution, but the names of the sailors from the Maine remain.

⁵²⁹ *The Crisis*, November 1917, p. 290.

leader of the *Partido Independiente de Color*), and others “happily dead in Cuba.”⁵³⁰ Bradt, the NAACP worried, “[spoke] for America” in Cuba.⁵³¹

Bradt was a central player in the development of the tourist industry in Havana and had obtained, over the previous years, a monopoly on sport entertainment in the city. He had received lucrative grants from the Havana City Council to advertise and entice American tourists to vacation and spend money in Havana.⁵³² Given the restrictive laws in most of the United States on boxing, and Havana’s year-round sunshine, Bradt and the city council envisioned the city as a modern sporting attraction. With Mexico in the turmoil of Revolution, Havana, they hoped, would enjoy a healthy income from the north.⁵³³

Cuban “sportmen,” like Budinich’s student Bernardino San Martín, were angered by what they saw as foreign interlopers who with the collusion of their government and the advantage of ready capital were stealing the impetus to develop sport on the island.⁵³⁴ Boxing in Cuba, since 1910, had been illegal. Several times matches had been stopped or reported to the police on the grounds of indecency (shirtless boxers in tight trunks). In agreeing to allow a foreigner to stage lucrative matches in the elite neighborhood of Vedado, the authorities were willfully stifling local initiative.⁵³⁵

⁵³⁰ On Esténoz see Aling Helg, *Our Rightful Share*.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, *The Crisis*. This article in the NAACP magazine was not free from casting aspersions of a racial or ethnic nature, it labeled Bradt as a “Russian from Tennessee,” most likely denoting that he was Jewish, but, paradoxically arguing that he was a representative American.

⁵³² *The Cuba Review: All About Cuba*, Published by the Munson Steamship Line, December, 1911, p. 13. This same issue carried the news that Bradt’s daughter, Ms. Delphine Bradt, was the first woman to fly a plane in Cuba, at Camp Colombia.

⁵³³ This historical moment in which Europe and Mexico was in turmoil had a welcome effect on Cuba. With these markets for entertainment closed to most performers and athletes, a number of Europeans and Americans who would otherwise be employed there tried Cuba as a temporary home. The effect of this was to accelerate Cuba’s exposure to outside ideas and cultural trends. See: *El Mundo*, March 14, 1915.

⁵³⁵ This point is argued by one of the would-be Cuban boxing promoters, Bernadino San Martín, in his propagandistic pamphlet *El Arte de los Puños* (1922). San Martín characterized the American entrepreneurs as

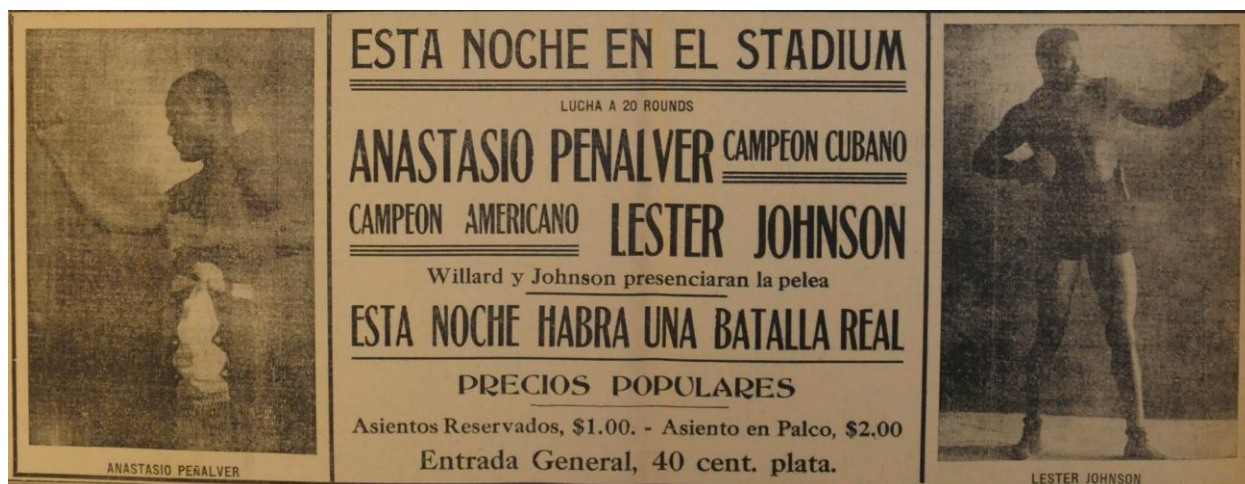


Figure 7: Advertisement for bout between Afro-Cuban Anastasio Penalver and African-American John Lester Johnson, and a Battle Royal which Johnson and Willard will attend. *El Mundo*, 31 March 1915.

When news broke that the boxing match between Willard and Johnson might be held in Havana, George Bradt saw a business opportunity. He dusted off one of his many concessions from the City Council and built the first Cuban locale dedicated to the staging of boxing matches. He was spurred on by arrival Billy Gibson, a fight promoter from the Bronx, New York, who planned to build venues to accommodate the growing popularity of prizefighting.⁵³⁶ In February, Bradt constructed a stadium that would hold 15,000 spectators at a cost of \$25,000. Boxing in Cuba, it was posited by the *New York Times*, would finally allow championship matches “to a finish,” a feature that was not permitted in the United States.⁵³⁷ The Havana City Council voted to award Bradt permission to build the stadium, first in Maceo Park, closer to

disreputable businessmen who sometimes staged illegal matches that “tricked” the paying public by “fixing” fights. San Martín portrays himself as a heroic defender of Cuban boxing who in the face of legal prohibition carried out matches clandestinely in the courtyard of the newspaper *Cuba*. He further characterized the Havana Stadium as a *Castillo de Naipes* (House of Cards), to associate it with the degraded practice of professional sport (as opposed to amateur contests) and gambling. Bernadino San Martín, *El Arte de los Puños* (Havana: 1922).

⁵³⁶ Willy del Pino, *Enciclopedia del boxeo cubano*.

⁵³⁷ *New York Times*, 3 February 1915, p. 12., Fights “to a finish” were those in which a set number of rounds did not determine the end of a match. Finish fights could be extended indefinitely to the point where one boxer was definitively the winner.

downtown, before revoking that concession out of respect for the Afro-Cuban war hero.⁵³⁸ To soften the blow to Cuban prohibitions on prizefighting, Bradt was to hold to benefits, one for the local Orphans' Home (*Casa de Beneficicia*) and another in which the gate receipts would be donated to the Mayor to dispose with as he saw fit.⁵³⁹ Together with an improvised array of vaudevillian acts including a trained monkey, a transvestite singer, and burlesque performances, Bradt presented "Battle Royals."⁵⁴⁰ In these spectacles, once common in the U.S. South, 6-8 members of the "colored race" fought until one remained standing. This was violence without pretense of skill or rules. The fighters, often with little or no training, mounted the blood-spattered ring and were blindfolded. On the sound of the bell, the half inebriated crowd cheered them on to strike, grapple, and kick the other men until they could no longer lift themselves from the canvas. This was hailed as "the greatest amusement in all of Havana." Battle Royals took root in the Cuban capital and seldom failed to elicit laughter from the audience. In the evenings, after the horse races in Marianao, Americans in their finest attire joined Cubans to see and be seen in the sea air and the electric lights and to watch Afro-Cubans and African-Americans beat each other into submission. These shows were more frequent in the weeks leading up to the Johnson-Willard bout, and represented an opportunity to exploit the curiosity of the Cuban and American public. Boxing and other such spectacles, in an era of mass advertising, was big business.

In the months leading up to the Johnson-Willard match on April 5th, the impresarios of the Stadium invested enormous amounts of capital (which they made a point of explaining to the Havana public) to attract first-rate boxers. They also tried to rearrange the leisure schedules of

⁵³⁸ *The Havana Post*, 8 January 1915. The proposed stadium was to be "beautiful enough" to become a permanent fixture and to impel the tourist industry forward.

⁵³⁹ *The Havana Post*, 13 January 1915.

⁵⁴⁰ "Battle Royale," *El Mundo*, 7 April 1915.

Havana's citizens by declaring Saturday night to be the "noche deportivo," attempting to change from Sunday the traditional day of leisure and entertainment for Cubans.⁵⁴¹ This reorganization of temporal space was already underway with the almost daily horse races conducted in the Hippodrome in the posh suburb of Marianao, also under American ownership. Social clubs, growing in popularity in Havana with the high visibility of the Vedado Tennis Club and the *Club Atlético de Cuba*, contributed to reorganization of social spaces dedicated to physical culture around the date of the bout.

These examples of wealthy and exclusive clubs notwithstanding, the vast majority of the thousands of organizations charged only nominal monthly dues and were formed by members from almost all social classes.⁵⁴² One of the largest and most visible, with its enormous building on the Prado was the *Asociación de Dependientes de Comercio*, composed of members of the lower-middle class who worked as store clerks.⁵⁴³ Though their profession gave them only the slightest claim to middle class respectability, *en masse* they could afford to build their opulent clubhouse that boasted a swimming pool, gymnasium, billiards room, a library and other amenities.⁵⁴⁴ Through this and other associations sport entered Havana in a more sustained manner than unique events like the Johnson-Willard bout.

⁵⁴¹ *El Mundo*, 29 March 1915.

⁵⁴² Though less visible in public, working and middle-class clubs constituted the majority of these organizations. One example that received press attentions was an athletic club formed by dock workers and stevedores who in 1910 challenged any foreign boxers in the city to a contest.

⁵⁴³ Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*.

⁵⁴⁴ At least a tenth of the citizens of Havana were members in these elite clubs that promoted athletics as a central part of their programs. For example, the Clerk's Club had a membership of over 30,000 while the Galician Club claimed nearly 40,000 members. The general civic-social engagement through these types of associations was likely much higher, given that most observers only commented on the highly visible elite groups. These clubs deserve further study as they fulfilled a number of roles within Havana society. They provided education and medical care for their members and their families and organized athletic events. The Clerk's Club contained a state of the art gymnasium with the latest physical culture equipment imported from the United States. See: A Hyatt Verrill, *Cuba Past and Present* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1920); "The Clerk's Club of Havana" *Cuba Review and Bulletin* (New York: Munson Steamship Line, 1907), pp. 18-20.

It was by default and mere chance that the bout took place in Havana in the first place. Johnson, Curley, and Willard had all planned to hold the bout in Juárez, Mexico just across the border from El Paso. As Johnson was waiting in Havana, he received word that negotiations with both Carranza and Pancho Villa had fallen through. The exact details of this aborted transaction appear vague and a clear understanding is yet more difficult given the inflated stories of intrigue that saturated the American press. What is clear is that while Villa was still in favor of holding the match and taking his cut, Carranza, normally no friend to the U.S., had threatened to have Johnson turned over to Pinkertons in Mexico if he landed there.⁵⁴⁵

On the day of the much anticipated bout, three squadrons of the Cuban Army, armed with machetes, guarded the ring to keep the crowd back from the fighters.⁵⁴⁶ The spectators waved white flags to show their racial preference. In the over one hundred degree heat, Jess Willard knocked out Jack Johnson in the 26th round, regaining the heavyweight title for the white race. Shortly thereafter, Willard announced that he would draw the color line, refusing to fight other black boxers.⁵⁴⁷ After the match, while white America celebrated and toasted Willard's health, Cuban journalists tried to explain to their audience the "ethnic intransigence of the country of lynching."⁵⁴⁸ Willard had regained the title for the "racists among the Yankees."⁵⁴⁹

Years after the match, when Johnson tried to regain the limelight by claiming that he had been deceived into willfully losing in Havana, many Cubans were all too eager to believe him.

He had been swindled by greedy American promoters with the promise that he would be allowed

⁵⁴⁵ Finis Farr, *Black Champion; The Life and Times of Jack Johnson* (Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett Publications, 1969), pp. 160-61. Among the hundreds of American newspapers that carried the story: *The day book* (Chicago) 23 February 1915; The Tacoma Times published a picture of Villa and Willard under the title "Pancho Villa Fight Promoter Gets Big Slice of Bout Money," *Tacoma Times*, 13 January 1915; *New York Tribune*, 23 February 1915; *Washington Herald*, 18 February 1915; *El Paso Herald*, 2 February 1915.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ *El Día*, 6 April 1915.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

to again enter the United States if he lost to a white man. These same promoters had even refused to pay the carpenter who had constructed the ring for the fight.⁵⁵⁰

It was this intensity of feeling and purpose that pervaded the popular reception of the dozens of boxers who arrived in Havana in 1915. Cubans were new to boxing, but most commentators saw the championship match as both the moment for Cuba to make itself known on the world stage and to learn from the presence of so many professionals in the city. Writing under the pseudonym “Frangiopane,” Victor Muñoz asked his readers: “We have Jack Johnson in Havana: it is said that there might happen in our city a fight for the championship of the world...there are daily horse races...a Stadium where there are weekly boxing matches, in the exterior circus of the new Colón theater they will effect other competitions of this nature...*who says we are not progressing?*”⁵⁵¹

The manner in which the people of Havana were behaving under the pressure of being a focal point of world attention encouraged the journalists who covered the social scenes emanating from this novelty. The intensity and discernment with which thousands of Cubans followed the developing plans for the fight, even buying tickets ahead of time (this was, they argued very un-Cuban) was proof of these observers saw “how our character is changing and how we are learning good things from other peoples.”⁵⁵²

Beyond the simple fetishization of masculine strength or admiration of a well-muscled body, the Havana press saw in modern athletes important values whose increasing deployment was a goal for all Cubans. These values were displayed by athletes from a number of countries and were not necessarily tied to one national culture. As professionals, these men pursued

⁵⁵⁰ San Martín, *El Arte de los Punos*.

⁵⁵¹ *El Mundo*, 4 March 1915, p. 10. Italics added.

⁵⁵² *El Mundo*, 19 March 1915.

wealth through the deployment of skill, intelligence, and strength. Few if any of these individuals were born into a wealth or the leisure classes. Central to their success was dedication, “science” and hard work. The boxer, as an archetype of masculinity, abstained from smoking, drinking and drugs and displayed “good customs [buenas costumbres].”

When Jack Johnson and Jess Willard arrived by train and steamship in the Havana harbor on separate days they were both greeted by thousands of curiosity seekers and fans. The nascent sporting press alongside front pages had published dozens of pictures, brief biographies, and a dizzying catalogue of the ephemera of their daily lives—from the food they ate and the cars they drove to legal arguments surrounding Jack Johnson’s many brushes with the law.⁵⁵³ Willard, as portrayed to the Cuban public, was a good natured rancher, a giant of man with simple habits who sought to win back the title for the white race. Johnson’s character was far more intriguing; he made for good copy and Cubans were fascinated with him.

As the Afro-Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén would remember years later, Jack Johnson was “our model of a champion.”⁵⁵⁴ Just off the train from Cienfuegos in late February, Johnson addressed the Cuban people, encouraging women and children to watch him train and to meet with him.⁵⁵⁵ He portrayed himself as both educator and entertainer, directing himself to Cuban youth who he would show, by example, how to lead a healthier life. He spoke to Cuban women, careful to put such forwardness in a cosmopolitan context, inviting them to come and watch him

⁵⁵³ Since 1913, Johnson had been in self-imposed exile. When he finally returned to the United States after seven years abroad in Europe and Latin America, he served one year in Leavenworth Prison for violation of the Mann Act, also known as the “White Slave Act,” for transporting a white prostitute across state lines. He later married the prostitute, but this had no effect on his sentence. Another boxer, the Argentine Luis Ángel Firpo, also was charged with violation of the Mann Act. See Roberts, *Papa Jack*.

⁵⁵⁴ Nicolás Guillén, *Las grandes elegías y otros poemas* (Ayacucho, Peru: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1984), p. 202. Guillén was twelve years old in 1915.

⁵⁵⁵ *El Mundo*, 23 February 1915; *El Heraldo de Cuba*, 23 February 1915.

train as had other women in Australia, France, England, and Canada.⁵⁵⁶ Just a few years earlier, police had stopped matches in Havana where men like Johnson had appeared in similar attire, shirtless, for fear of scandalizing the women and children of the city.

Johnson also sought to fill the role as a champion of working class men. He agreed to appear in a benefit for the *Comite Central de Torcedores de la Habana* (Central Committee of Cigar Makers of Havana) at the *Payret* Theater off Central Park.⁵⁵⁷ Given the war in Europe and the decreased demand for Cuban cigars, the majority of cigar rollers in the many factories in Havana were out of work. The *Comite* was formed as a mutual aid society and collective bargaining organization to negotiate and disperse charity from the Cuban government and the Catholic Church for the thousands of those out of work. Johnson had appeared in hundreds such variety shows and afterwards the *Comite* published a formal thank you letter.⁵⁵⁸

Johnson, the consummate businessman, wasted no time in negotiating endorsement deals with expensive tailors who sought to use his notoriety to attract clients.⁵⁵⁹ He also ingratiated himself with the working classes by refusing to charge admission for the thousands of onlookers who gathered daily to watch him train for the match in the Havana Stadium. Johnson appeared in dozens of shows in theatrical venues, was introduced in theaters, racetracks and other public places, and generally drew a crowd wherever he went in Havana.

Accounts of his risqué lifestyle, one journalist commented, had given him enormous popularity in Havana.⁵⁶⁰ On February 23, the announcement that the Willard-Johnson fight

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁷ *El Mundo*, 6 March 1915.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁰ *El Día*, 5 April 1915.

would be held there received greater headlines than the death of famous Independence era leader Gonzalo de Quesada.⁵⁶¹

Despite the relatively benign response from the press upon his arrival, Johnson would run into problems in Havana that for him were all too common. Amid reports of and pictures of an Afro-Cuban couple accused of stealing white children for use in African rituals, newspapers announced that Jack Johnson had been refused a room in all the “best” hotels in Havana.⁵⁶² He was surprised to see the “color line,” drawn against him yet again. After alighting from the train from Cienfuegos where he had arrived on a schooner from Barbados he made for the “most American” hotel in Havana, the *Plaza*.⁵⁶³ After securing a stay in the most expensive suite for he and his “languid French,” “white wife,” he sat for breakfast in the hotel’s restaurant.⁵⁶⁴ While eating, the manager of the hotel approached him and informed that Johnson would not be allowed to stay. After showing anger and “boastfulness” he reclaimed his bags and set out to look for another place to stay while en route to Mexico.

On hearing that Johnson had been repeatedly refused lodging at all the best hotels in the city (*Inglaterra, Plaza, and Pasaje*), an Afro-Cuban member of the *Ayuntamiento de la Habana*, Eligio Madán, publicly announced that he would offer his home to the boxer.⁵⁶⁵ Madán published a letter in the leading dailies, outraged at the attempts by American owned hotels to

⁵⁶¹ *El Heraldo de Cuba*, 23 February 1915.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*

⁵⁶³ “Johnson Barred at Havana Hotel,” *Chicago Tribune*, 23 February 1915. Johnson was barred from the Plaza even though almost everyone else connected to the bout, managers, trainers, and gamblers, stayed there. The hotel filled after refusing Johnson a room, proving that the manager’s claims that it had nothing to do with Johnson’s race but with lack of available rooms was untrue. *El Mundo*, 4 April 1915.

⁵⁶⁴ *El Heraldo de Cuba*, 23 February 1915.

⁵⁶⁵ “Jack Johnson no encuentra donde hospedarse,” *El Heraldo de Cuba*, 23 February 1915. Madán was the focus of many headlines generated by his stances for Afro-Cuban “honor,” as when he gained public attention for dueling with swords against a white member of the Ayuntamiento later in 1915. See: Primelles, *Cronica Cubana*, p. 51.; Néstor Carbonell and Emeterio S. Santovenia, *El Ayuntamiento de la Habana: noviembre 16 de 1519 - noviembre 16 de 1919: reseña histórica* (Habana: Seoane y Fernández, 1919).

transpose their odious racism to Havana: “It is impossible that a famous man of my race will not find, here in Cuba, a stay worthy of him.” The next day, the *Heraldo de Cuba* carried a picture of Johnson at a reception party held in his honor at Madán’s home. Johnson appears in the center of a group of several Afro-Cuban men. He stands out due to his size and among dark suited elite Afro-Cubans he is dressed in a white suit. His white wife sits next to him and is erroneously identified as being French.⁵⁶⁶ This picture, reproduced in the tens of thousands on the front pages of the largest and most widely disseminated newspaper in Cuba, unnerved Cubans not used to publicizing interracial relationships.⁵⁶⁷ I have found no other images that paired Afro-Cuban men with white women from this period. Further commentary by Madán, who served as the unofficial link between the Afro-Cuban community and Jack Johnson, continued in the weeks leading up the fight. For the politician the implications of the bout for Afro-Cubans were clear: “Yes my race brothers...anticipate this! Soon we will see the white hope against black reality!”⁵⁶⁸ Johnson, son of former slaves from Galveston, Texas, was a transnational symbol of black reality in Cuba.

Though little is known about Eligio Madán, subsequent commentary suggests that he was secretly a “bablawo,” [sic] a religious leader in the Afro-Cuban tradition of Santería that was officially repressed by the same government he served in this period.⁵⁶⁹ As a local political and religious leader with roots in autonomous Afro-Cuban associations, Madán’s outrage was more

⁵⁶⁶ *El Heraldo de Cuba*, 25 February 1915.

⁵⁶⁷ Of the thirty-seven daily newspapers in Havana alone, in 1917, *El Heraldo de Cuba* had the largest circulation and received no subsidies from the government. Its daily run was estimated at 40,000 copies. See: Walter Hines Page, *The World’s Work*, Vol. XXXIV [May-October, 1917], p. 566. In 1915, the paper’s editor was Marquez Stirling, the former Cuban minister to Mexico who had been present in Mexico City when Madero was assassinated in 1913.

⁵⁶⁸ *El Heraldo de Cuba*, 17 March 1915.

⁵⁶⁹ Marcelo Madán, *Tratado de los Odu de Ifa* (Caracas, Venezuela: Inversiones Orunmila, 2000); Casa del Caribe. *Del Caribe*, (Santiago de Cuba: Casa del Caribe, 1983). For the public campaigns against Afro-Cuban religion in this period see Bronfman, *Measures of Equality*.

than understandable. Though no Afro-Cuban publications from 1915 have survived (they had become increasingly untenable after the massacre of the *Partido Independiente* in 1912) Madán's call for racial solidarity and his offering of his home to his "race brother" was a brave act of resistance in an extraordinarily intense racial environment with fresh memories of race war. Though there are few extant sources to gauge the response of Afro-Cubans to Johnson, impressionist evidence comes from one American reporter, who relayed to his readers that "hundreds of negroes, the best sports on the island, are anxious to attend the fight" but could not afford it, and were "scraping together pennies" to attend.⁵⁷⁰

Other local politicians, among them V. Morales, Gonzalo Pérez, and Fernández Guevara y Alberdi, clashed with Madán and renewed their objections over both boxing and Jack Johnson, presenting a petition before the *Ayuntamiento* to strengthen the now unenforceable ban on boxing.⁵⁷¹ Their petition was seconded by the prestigious National Association of Veterans of the Wars for Independence, of which President Menocal was a member.⁵⁷² The Association wrote the President beseeching him, in the name of the sacrifices made by so many veterans to "regenerate the country," that he not allow boxing in Cuba. Letters from abroad also crossed the President's desk. Albert Doogan, the President of the University of Michigan, feared that with the popularity of boxing, bullfighting would soon be re-legalized and he pressed the President not to allow it.⁵⁷³ The Association of Baptist Churches of Eastern Cuba, claiming over two-thousand members, also made clear their opposition to these brutalizing customs.⁵⁷⁴ The

⁵⁷⁰ Unknown author, "Special Box for Menocal," *New York Tribune*, 2 April 1915.

⁵⁷¹ Primelles, *Crónica Cubana*, p. 102. This group of Senators were also the leaders in trying to legalize bullfighting.

⁵⁷² "Asociación Nacional de Veteranos de la Independencia to President Major General Mario Menocal" *Archivo General de Cuba, Fondo Secretaría de la Presidencia*, Leg. 19, No. 8.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, Albert Doogan to President of the Republic, Menocal, 6 April 1915.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.* Convención Bautista de Cuba Oriental to Secretaría.

enormous amounts of money to be made during a prizefight of this magnitude, paired with Menocal's embrace of boxing in Cuba, made these attempts to stem the events underway powerless.⁵⁷⁵

Cuban women, argued on journalist, also had a role to play in approving of boxing. Muñoz, writing for *El Mundo* argued that women should be allowed to attend boxing matches, especially those staged with such international attention as the one to take place in the suburb of Marianao. To convince the Cuban public of the propriety of women as observers at this type of sporting events, the editor of *El Mundo* had hired one of the first female sportswriters, the British vaudeville singer Miss Cecilia Wright. In her first articles, she astutely predicted the outcome of the match and argued that Cuban women should be encouraged to attend so that they could best understand how to educate the future generation of men.⁵⁷⁶

Three days after the Johnson-Jefferies bout the films produced by Santos y Artigas taken illegally at the match debuted in Havana. This was despite Johnson's desperate attempts to sue the entertainers for the ridiculous sum of 500,000 pesos and appealing to the secret police to aid him.⁵⁷⁷ George Bradt's newspaper, *The Havana Post*, used the opportunity to mock Cubans and Jack Johnson, stating that the boxer was too ignorant to understand the silly custom of Cuban "mañana" and that he would not be able to get an injunction (if Cubans even knew what that meant) to stop the bout.⁵⁷⁸ Johnson had shown himself to be ridiculous yet again in trying to fraudulently obtain an American passport after the bout. He was able to convince an embassy

⁵⁷⁵ President Menocal went several times to watch Johnson train while preparing for the fight in Havana. Johnson remembered giving Menocal's son, Mario Jr., a pair of the gloves he had trained with. Johnson, *In the Ring and Out*; *El Mundo*, 16 March 1915; *The Washington Times*, 16 March 1915.

⁵⁷⁶ "De juzgado de gaurdia" *El Mundo*, 8 April 1915; *El Mundo*, 23 March 1915; "Johnson victim of 'mañana,'" *The Havana Post*, 8 April 1915.

⁵⁷⁷ "Luchas entre blancos y negros," *El Mundo*, 8 April 1915.

⁵⁷⁸ "Johnson victim of 'mañana';" *Ibid.*

worker to grant him one, but when the head of legation was made aware he had it immediately revoked.⁵⁷⁹ Cuban readers also learned that after the bout, groups of white vigilantes had gone to the “black belt” of Chicago to mock *negros* and Jack Johnson’s mother. That same day, the lawyer and Senator from *Oriente*, a proponent of American missionary work in Cuba, Erasmo Regueiferos, presented his approval of a law to ban boxing in Cuba once and for all.⁵⁸⁰ The law was drafted by fellow Senator Antonio Gonzalo Pérez, and after “prolonged study” Regueiferos endorsed the proposal. The disgust evident in the wording of the law was compounded by the actions of Americans in Cuba. As they hurriedly fled the island, the fight’s American organizers had left behind a slew of unpaid debts ranging from hotel bills to the daily wages of the carpenters who had built the ring.⁵⁸¹ The legislators moved “to stop the acclimatization of boxing in Cuba , which was a custom so improper for the generous and elevated sentiments...that characterizes the Cuban people.” The proposed law continued, that even in the United States, “the country that marches at the head of civilization” boxing was reputed by the vast majority of people and this is why it had landed in Cuba. Boxing had been illegal under the Spanish, illegal under both American occupations, and had been illegal since 1910. Those politicians who had allowed the recent bouts had done possibly irreparable harm to the “civilization and humanity in Cuba.” This law did everything but mention President Menocal by name, but it did state in one of the articles that any public functionary who approved a boxing match would be subject to a fine and would be unable to hold office for a year. Greater penalties, in line with the American prohibition of boxing during the first military intervention,

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid. This story is backed up in the aforementioned Bureau of Investigation files, and was a major embarrassment for the American legation in Cuba.

⁵⁸⁰ Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Missionary Voice* (Nashville, Tenn: Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Board of Missions, 1911).

⁵⁸¹ “Contra el boxeo,” *El Mundo*, 8 April 1915; *The Havana Post*, 9 April 1915.

were levied on managers and promoters: a fine of up to 5,000 pesos and year in prison.⁵⁸² The law was a success, and boxing disappeared, for a while from Havana.

At the root of this law was a reaction, mirrored in the events of 1910, that feared the barbarization of the Cuban public and the rising ambitions of Cubans from the working classes who both flocked to these types of “diversions” and saw within them an avenue of social advance. The Cuban Jack Johnson had trained to become a boxer with the African-American journeyman John Lester Johnson and their match in March had generated hope among Cubans that a “Cuban Champion” was not far in the offing. Jack Johnson, perhaps the most hated man in America, had aligned himself with Afro-Cubans and out of work laborers, furthering his opposition to the racial and social norms that the above politicians represented. Far from mere entertainment, boxing culture entered Cuba as a representative means of advance for the thousands of working class men who gathered daily to watch Johnson train on the *malecón*, ninety miles from the United States.

The unique American relationship with Cuba, founded on the basis of military domination and an economic stranglehold over the sugar monoculture, was also mirrored in the events of 1915. American businessmen enjoyed free-reign in Havana, abridged national sovereignty at will by violating laws with impunity, and treated the island as little more than a staging ground in their quest for profit. Boxing was vehicle for many levels of inequality. The sport, after a brief period of illegality and the first ring death of Cuban in 1919 would return to the national psyche in the early 1920s. That is the focus of Chapter Four. Before resuming that

⁵⁸² “Anti-Boxing Bill is Approved by Senate,” *The Havana Post*, 9 April 1915. Pushing his impunity in the face of Cuban resistance, Brady published a list of upcoming boxing matches at his Stadium next to the announcement of the new prohibition.

narrative, however, Chapter Three examines a similar phenomenon in Mexico, where the Revolution “Handed out gloves to everyone.”

CHAPTER IV

FROM THE EXOTIC TO THE EVERYDAY: “THE REVOLUTION PASSED OUT BOXING GLOVES TO EVERYBODY”

Mexico City, Paco Sotelo, 1936

With fifteen seconds remaining in the tenth and final round, Chucho Nájera delivered a straight right hand to face of seventeen year old Francisco “Paco” Sotelo in front of thousands of working-class Mexicans in the *Arena Nacional*. On the count of five, Sotelo tried to raise himself but fell face-first to the canvas.⁵⁸³ The “half-drunk” crowd taunted him and screamed that he was a “coward” and the fight was “fixed.” The ringside doctor, Bolaños Cacho, stepped sideways between the ropes as Sotelo’s manager carried the unconscious young fighter to his corner.⁵⁸⁴ As Nájera exited the ring on the shoulders of his fans, the doctor gave Sotelo two adrenaline injections, trying to revive him. When the fighter’s pupils failed to contract in reaction to the doctor’s pocket flashlight, he immediately called for an ambulance and Sotelo’s limp body was taken to the *Puesto Central de Socorros* in downtown Mexico City. It was around midnight on June 7th, 1936.

Alejandro Aguilar Reyes (1902-1961), better known by his pen name “Fray Nano,” reported these details on the front page of his newspaper, *Afición*. With daily print runs in the tens of thousands, the newspaper was dedicated to boxing and had enough subscribers from Mexico and Latin America to fund ten pages covering local and transnational pugilism. The

⁵⁸³ Alejandro Aguilar Reyes, “Sótelo esta gravísimo,” *Afición*, 7 June 1936.

⁵⁸⁴ Bolaños Cacho had been the head medical doctor of the Boxing Commission in Mexico City since 1926. He worked actively in several charitable organizations including children’s homes and was known as “the best friend of all prizefighters.” See: Pepe Romero, *A Million Pesos!* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), p. 146; Humberto Musacchio, *Milenios de México* (México: Hoja Casa Editorial, 1999); Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Estampas de nacionalismo popular mexicano: ensayos sobre cultura popular y nacionalismo* (México: CIESAS, 1994).

magazine would continue to promote boxing and transnational sport for over thirty years.⁵⁸⁵

Afición employed a “small army” of photographers and caricaturists who captured the personalities of local boxing celebrities and brought visual accounts of local and foreign boxing culture to even illiterate Mexicans. In the process, they created a valuable graphic and narrative record of this subculture. Drawings of Sotelo and Nájera’s faces graced the front page for days leading up to the bout. The day after being knocked unconscious, *Afición* reported that Sotelo had never awoken from his coma and died “in the arms” of his manager at around four in the morning. No legal charges were filed against Nájera. His fight with Sotelo was legal, and under the jurisdiction of the nascent and controversial Mexican Boxing Commission.⁵⁸⁶

Over 20,000 people, a cross-section of Mexican society, filed by his coffin at the upscale *Agencia Gayosso* funeral home on Hidalgo Street, a few blocks from the Mexico City *zócalo*.⁵⁸⁷ Sotelo’s working-class parents could not pay for such a sumptuous wake., Wealthier Mexican boxing fans like General Gustavo Arévalo Vera, a member of the Boxing Commission, and the Mexican-American and Puerto Rican impresarios of the *Arena Nacional*, Jimmie Fitten and Carlos Lavergne, paid the expenses.⁵⁸⁸ Fitten tried to hold an interview but he had not slept and remained, “sobbing” by the side of the boxer as the doctors had worked feverously to revive

⁵⁸⁵ *Afición* began publication in 1930 and was one of the first Mexican newspapers dedicated to the international coverage of sport. Fray Nano was a foundational figure in Mexican professional athletics and is remembered yearly in Mexico: the award for the best sport journalism is named after him. The foundation of popular sporting magazines like *Afición* (1930), *Ring* (1936) and *Fútbol* have been cited as evidence of Mexican popular culture operating at odds to state centered educational attempts to foment athletics as an alternative form of social organization, especially in rural areas. This engagement was meant to stem vices such as drinking, gambling, and violence through the constructive and community building activities of sport. See: Kevin Brewster, Patriotic Pastimes: The Role of Sport in Post-Revolutionary Mexico,” in David Wood and P. Louise Johnson, eds., *Sporting Cultures: Hispanic Perspectives on Sport, Text, and the Body* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 1-20.

⁵⁸⁶ “Murio Paco Sotelo cuatro horas después de la pelea,” *Afición*, 8 June 1936.

⁵⁸⁷ Definitive figures are difficult to establish. *Afición* places the number at 20,000 and is backed up by Talán, who was present at the funeral while newspaper reports from *El Universal* and *Excelsior* place the number at “many thousands.”

⁵⁸⁸ “Punetazo trágico: murio el boxeador Sotelo,” *El Universal* 8 June 1936.

him.⁵⁸⁹ Fitten, originally from San Francisco, had come to Mexico in 1926 and had presided over the increasing popularity of boxing as a promoter, matchmaker, and importer of American boxing talent.⁵⁹⁰ During the funeral, fellow boxers and other athletes and managers covered the cost of the police service that was necessary to maintain order among the massive crowd.⁵⁹¹ The procession stopped at the *Nacional*. Fray Nano gave a short and stirring oration that centered on bravery, youth, and heaven: this first ring death in Mexico, he lamented, would hopefully be the last. Guilt ridden and feint, Nájera was relieved of his post on the honor guard for fear that he would collapse and was taken home, “broken by emotion.” Sotelo’s father, speaking to reporters in the rain, said that he didn’t blame anyone for the death of his son, that he was “resigned to it.”⁵⁹² Taxi drivers offered their services for free and wealthier individuals gave rides in private cars to those who could not walk.

The long procession led from the *Nacional* to the gravesite in Sotelo’s home neighborhood. The youth was a “favorite son” of the small town formerly known San Ángel, which had recently been rechristened after the former Revolutionary General and President, as Villa Obregón. An “enormous multitude...contrite and somber began the long march to the cemetery. Among them were “people from all ages and social classes...aristocrats, professionals, laborers, students, shoe-shiners, paper boys, youngsters—all passed in front of his coffin and accompanied him to the distant cemetery (*panteón*).”⁵⁹³ After an hour’s march they

⁵⁸⁹ “Murio Paco Sotelo cuatro horas después de la pelea,” *Afición*, 8 June 1936

⁵⁹⁰ Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Migración, Exp. 162744, Luis James Fitten y Sarmiento File. Fitten was an ideal candidate to promote boxing in Mexico. His mother was Mexican, he was Catholic, and he spoke fluent Spanish and was “bicultural.” He managed some of the first Mexican international champions such as Juan Zurita and “Baby” Casanova in the 1930s. Bicultural boxing managers worked on both sides of the border, and one of Fitten’s competitors was the Greek born Gregory Parnassus, who was an early promoter of Chicano boxers in the United States. Jorge Iber and Samuel O. Regalado. *Mexican Americans and Sports: A Reader on Athletics and Barrio Life* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2007).

⁵⁹¹ Raúl Talán, *En el 3er Round* (México: Raúl Talán), pp. 159-64.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, “Murio Paco Sotelo cuatro horas después de la pelea,”

⁵⁹³ Carlos Vera, “20,000 personas desfilaron ante el cadáver de Sotelo,” *Afición*, 9 June 1936.

arrived in San Ángel. All the shops were closed and public offices shut. Thousands more people joined the procession. At graveside a member of the staff opened the coffin so Sotelo's mother could have a last look at her son. Through the glass the attendees saw that his eyes were half open. The only mark on his face was a small bruise below his right eye.⁵⁹⁴ When the first shovel-full of dirt hit the coffin, the chronicler for *Afición* waxed philosophical: "that sound touches the deepest recess of the soul and reminds us that, some sooner, some later, we all end there."⁵⁹⁵

More than a human interest story, this lengthy introductory narrative has a point. *Afición* and all the major dailies in Mexico City carried news of Sotelo's death and the dramatic funeral. None of them questioned the manner in which he died. Boxing had become an established fact of national life and an important form of entertainment for the hundreds of thousands of Mexicans who attended popular matches. Attendance at boxing matches, it was widely surmised, now outstripped bullfighting as the most attended blood sport in Mexico.⁵⁹⁶ The world famous matador from Guanajuato, Rodolfo Gaona, voiced his fear that the popularity of boxing among Mexican audiences was killing the centuries-old tradition of bullfighting. The only remedy was to "keep prizefighters out of Mexico."⁵⁹⁷ Gaona had debuted in Mexico City in 1905, while boxing was a marginal and exotic practice limited to elite spaces. In the ensuing twenty years Gaona had witnessed the process of cultural appropriation in which an elite sampling of foreign culture had been subsumed into the heart of Mexican popular culture. This process is strikingly absent from the extant historiography of modern Mexico.⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁶ "Millionaire Toreador Fears Boxing Will End His Sport in Mexico," *New York Times*, 22 February 1928.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ The one exception to this is the illustrated popular history of boxing: Marco Antonio Maldonado and Rubén Amador Zamora, *Historia del box mexicano* (México: Clío, 1999).

The account of the fatal match and the details of the massive funeral were also relayed, years later, by Raúl Talán. The former Olympic boxer and sport journalist wrote two popular memoirs on his experience of Mexican boxing in the twenties and thirties.⁵⁹⁹ He dedicated them to the men and one woman he deemed the “forgotten idols” and “national heroes,” of Mexico: the early practitioners of the “manly” sport of boxing. His first effort was *En el 3er Round (In the 3rd Round)*; and he immerses the reader in popular memory where English neologisms (ring, round, nocaut [knockout], battler, straight) introduced over the course of the twentieth century are imbedded within the lexicon of Mexican identity and drawn upon as central symbols of Mexican popular culture. The book sold over 10,000 copies in the first year alone.⁶⁰⁰ The title refers to that time in a boxing match when the combatants are sufficiently warmed-up and have gauged their opponent. The phrase becomes an extended metaphor to show that Mexicans, first through a fusion of “natural” bravery and “perseverance” that were fundamental characteristics of “the race” and later through skill and education had mastered the modern, controversial, and sometimes tragic sport of boxing.⁶⁰¹ From a cultural import into symbol of Mexican modernity and cultural attainment, the highly charged transnational culture of boxing had taken root in Mexico. Pugilism, formerly the preserve of elite, cosmopolitan Mexicans and expatriates resident in Mexico City, had become shorthand and parable for modern, hardscrabble, life in the metropolis.⁶⁰²

Before Sotelo’s untimely death, boxing had spread through the country by means of radio and newspaper coverage, specialized sport magazines, and the wide travels of transnational

⁵⁹⁹ Talán is remembered as “perhaps the greatest sports writer in the Spanish language.” José Luis Martínez, *La vieja guardia: protagonistas del periodismo mexicano* (México, D.F.: Plaza Janés, 2005). Talán had fought and lost in the first round of the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics as a representative of Mexico. United States Olympic Committee, *Report; Games of the Olympiad* (New York: United States Olympic Committee, 1928).

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁰¹ Talán, p. 23.

⁶⁰² The clearest examples of this in film will be examined later in this chapter.

boxers who held exhibitions in virtually every part of Mexican territory.⁶⁰³ The cultural nationalization of modern sport took place amid constant interpretations of international pugilistic events which, Mexican commentators argued, had worldwide and local resonance.⁶⁰⁴ Mexicans took on the names of foreign sport celebrities. Before international television broadcasts thousands of fans attended reenactments of distant bouts that were charged with racial and ethnic significance.⁶⁰⁵ Images of boxers and boxing saturated the experience of urban life in Mexico. Twenty-foot tall signs for boxing gyms, advertisements for a vast array of products from cigarettes to panacea tonics, movies, and serialized images formed part of the backdrop in front of which modern Mexican culture evolved. Renowned photojournalists like Gustavo Casasola, Enrique Díaz, and *avant garde* photographers like Manuel Álvarez Bravo documented the popularization of boxing as simultaneously exotic and embedded in the experience of *mexicanidad*.⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰³ See Chapter One. As Gregory Rodríguez has shown, Mexican American boxers from the 1910s onward also fought in Mexico, aided by promoters like Fitten. See: Gregory S. Rodríguez, “Palaces of Pain!—Arenas of Mexican-American Dreams: Boxing and the Foundation of Ethnic Mexican Identities in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 1999).

⁶⁰⁴ As will be examined later, in 1923 for example, boxing matches like Firpo-Dempsey garnered hundreds of inches of newspaper coverage and spurred the first national radio broadcast. Films of the bout were shown in every major theater in Mexico City and Jack Dempsey’s image was used as an advertisement to sell elixirs to increase male potency.

⁶⁰⁵ For example, weeks after Sotelo’s death, a large crowd gathered at the *Arena Nacional* to watch two boxers acting the parts, “blow by blow” of the African-American Joe Louis against the “pride” of Hitler, German boxer Max Schmeling. The weeks leading up the event *Afición*, in highly theatrical language, had explained that this “epic” bout was a war for racial supremacy between the “The Detroit Brown Bomber” and “The Hun from the Rhine.” *Afición*, 15-20 June 1936, advertisement for reenactment “Reconstruction, blow by blow and round by round,” 18 June 1936. This bout and its racial and political implications on the eve of World War Two, is the subject of David Margolick, *Beyond Glory: Joe Louis Vs. Max Schmeling and a World on the Brink* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006).

⁶⁰⁶ Manuel Álvarez Bravo’s 1930 picture “Boxeador,” for example, depicts a modern street scene in which a two-story-tall rendering of a boxer in fighting stance is embedded in a confused array of power lines and over a decaying cantina. The *Fondo Enrique Díaz* collection, housed in the *Archivo General de la Nación*, contains numerous photographic plates of boxers and boxing ranging from the 1910s-1940s. The private Gustavo Casasola collection, in Coyoacan, likewise contains many images ranging from the late nineteenth century to the 1970s. Especially in the early 1900s, both collections contain numerous images of African descended boxers in Mexican rings.

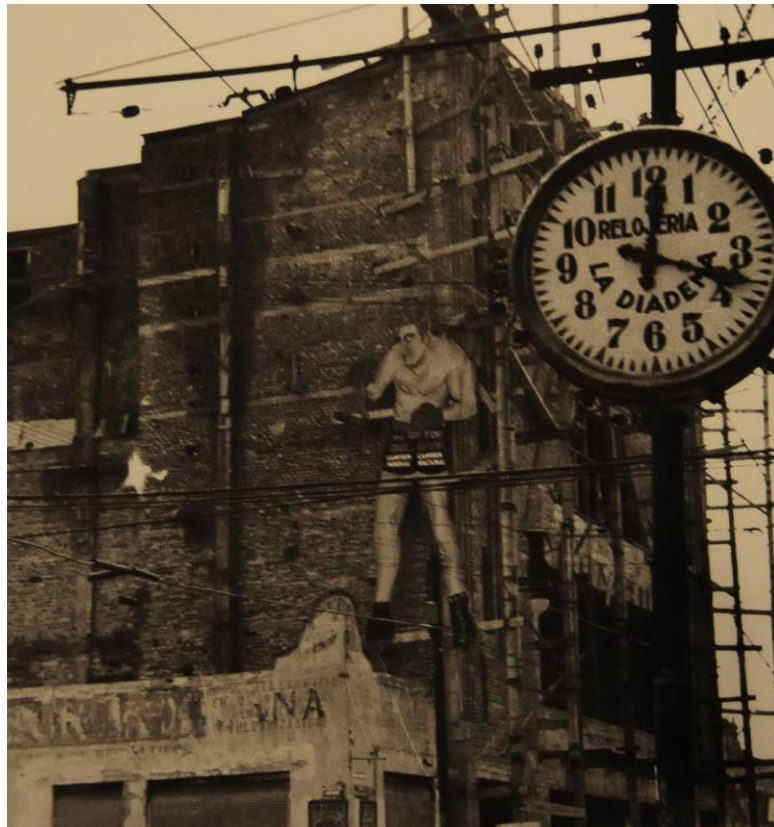


Figure 8: Detail of Manuel Alvarez Bravo, "The Boxer" c. 1930

MURIO PACO SOTELO CUATRO HORAS DESPUES DE LA PELEA

NUNCA RECOBRE EL CONOCIMIENTO
HOY A LAS 4 SERAN SUS FUNERALES SALIENDO DE LA AGENCIA "GAYOSSO"

Por CARLOS VIEIRA
 Redactor de LA AFICION.

LA AFICION (1a. SECCION)
 REPORTES Y TOROS

ANO VI. Núm. 1,243 México, lunes, 8 de junio de 1936. Registro en el Libro de la Oficina de la Clase 24.2 de fecha de 1931.

BUENA NOVILLADA DE PIEDRAS NEGRAS

Sus productos se destinarán a repatriar a los diestros mexicanos boyotados en España.—Todos estuvieron bien; voluntarios, valientes y ninguno cobró un solo centavo por exponer la vida en aras de un servicio a sus colegas en aprietos.

Crónica de MONORABO, Redactor de LA AFICION.

El pasado Sábado, Secretario General de la Unión Mexicana de Picadores y Bandejeros y Bandejeros—y con ellos esta agrupación, merecen el más fervoroso aplauso, no sólo por haber organizado esta novillada con tan buena fe, sino porque supieron despreocuparse, verter sus propias piraterías de quienes para su mayor provecho convertir a los valientes en simples de su talento, sólo atrevieron a una o dos poderosas: los diestros mexicanos que llevaron a España operan lo indispensable para el país, lo han podido tener porque...

UN TRIPLE DEL EMERGENTE CRUZ EN EL 90 DIO EL TRIUNFO A LOMAS SOBRE REGALIS

Por FRAY NANO, Redactor de LA AFICION.

ESDE el terreno de la Cruz Hermosa Carmona, director de la novena Lomas de Chapultepec, envió al fondo del Parque del Cuadrero de la Cruz Hermosa Cruz para que "salteara" la vaca tirabola, a las bolas que le...

Muy Buena Fue La Exhibición De Los Caballistas y Los Tiradores De Ayer

Por DON CHON, Redactor de LA AFICION.

Agradecemos de las autoridades de las escuelas de tiro y de la policía de la ciudad de México, por la gran exhibición que se dio ayer en el campo de tiro de la Secretaría de Guerra (disputación) de los cinco participantes que quedaron...

EN JUEGO DE 28 JITS Y 4 JOROS EL AGRARIO GANO AL NECAXA 11 A 7

Por DON CHON, Redactor de LA AFICION.

DOS CHICAS HUBO EN EL INTERCUBLES "A"

Por DON CHON, Redactor de LA AFICION.

PACO SOTELO

Después de haber sido el campeón del mundo de Socorro, el joven picador, murió a las 4 de la madrugada del día de hoy, a las 4 de la mañana, a causa de un ataque al corazón que sufrió al día siguiente en el momento de salir para su casa, en el momento de salir para su casa, en el momento de salir para su casa...

Figure 9: Detail of Front Page, Death of Sotelo, Afición, 8 June 1936.

As demonstrated in Chapter One, since the early nineteenth century, pugilism as a cultural signifier had entered popular consciousness through Mexican newspapers, *revistas*, and broadsheets. The first mentions of the sport were as a way to critique and counter British and American “barbarism.” The deployment of boxing narratives later became a cultural phenomenon to entertain and inform new consumers of transnational popular culture.⁶⁰⁷ Within twentieth century urban Mexico, boxing became both a cultural expression that included all social classes and a manner in which broader ideas of Mexican masculinity and national identity versus foreigners, especially Americans, were portrayed in popular public narratives.⁶⁰⁸ For example, popular newspapers like *Afición* published nationalist accounts of Mexican boxers in the United States, arguing that it was impossible for a Mexican to win a decision due to the racist and parochial attitudes of American judges who viewed Mexicans as “negros.” Americans, Mexican observers posited, feared that if a Mexican were to become champion that local Chicanos would be insolent and “unbearable.”⁶⁰⁹ The newspaper also served a forum for Mexicans to express national pride achieved through the medium of boxing, publishing hundreds of letters that spoke in nationalist terms.⁶¹⁰ International sport was a means to know the outside world and to participate, through the consumption of popular narratives, in a transnational

⁶⁰⁷ The first use of “Pugilato” as a cultural critique that I have found in the Mexican press comes from the *El Diario de Mexico* 9 April 1810. After describing the encounter of two “semi-naked” men in the ring, the author then rhetorically asks: “How is it possible, that the English, so proud of all their real or imagined advantages, dare to call themselves more civilized than other nations having similar shows? The inclination toward these diversions can only be born from a ferocious disposition of the soul and from a great disdain for human kind, because a man who has the gift of reason and sensibility would not suffer his a similar being to be so disgraced, making himself less than a beast for diversion...”

⁶⁰⁹ These views were expressed by Aguilar Reyes (Fray Nano) as he followed Mexican boxers to their bouts in Los Angeles, California. Reyes observed that even though most of the crowd was Mexican, American referees made it impossible for Mexican boxers to win a fair fight.

⁶¹⁰ One example of this is a letter to the editor that praised the “virile” attributes of Mexican boxers who “know how to put the Mexican flag on high,” especially as representatives of Mexico abroad. “Varios aficionados,” *El Publico Dice, Afición*, 7 January 1932.

culture with its own language, rules, and symbols.⁶¹¹ The irony often cited was that in a quintessentially meritocratic medium, Mexicans were still unable to compete based on skill alone. The rapid extension of media coverage of sport culture was initiated and consumed by Mexicans whose affinities ranged beyond the confines of the traditional and the local: their interests and allegiances as *aficionados* created cultural spaces in which the exotic became the everyday.⁶¹² Mexicans were aware of the cultural stereotypes about Mexican boxers generated in the United States. Bob Edgren, the most widely published American boxing commentator of the 1920s and 30s, argued that the “Aztec race,” had put forth many “physically superior” boxers who had lucrative capabilities. Their fatal flaw was being headstrong, given to drunkenness, and, in general, “mentally inferior.” Fray Nano, reprinting the article for the readers of *Afición*, agreed “unfortunately” that Edgren was correct. Given their lack of education and the sudden wealth, Mexican boxers from the popular classes like Luis Villanueva imbibed the patriotic rhetoric of their “paisanos” who dreamed of a “champion of their race,” and failed to care for themselves.⁶¹³

Within these expanding boundaries of *lo mexicano*, Talán’s vignettes, cinematic portrayals and popular literature, are composed of boxers, hustlers, businessmen, doctors, wives, drunks, travelers, African-Americans, “blonds,” and *mestizos*. The antagonists are greedy

⁶¹¹ For a discussion of modern sport as product of urban industrial society see: Richard Giulianotti, *Sport: A Critical Sociology* (Cambridge U.K.: Polity Press, 2005).

⁶¹² “The process of globalization occurring in late modernity has an important effect on cultural identities for three main reasons. First, because in the formation or construction of any cultural identity the idea of the ‘other’ is crucial, and globalization puts individuals, groups and nations in contact with a series of new ‘others’ in relation to whom they can define themselves. This can only happen through the media. As Thompson has noted, ‘the process of self-formation is increasingly nourished by mediated symbolic materials.’ The construction of personal identities has become more complex and open-ended because the media increasingly mediate it. The globalization of communications by means of electronic signals has allowed the separation of social relations from the local contexts.” Jorge Larraín, *Identity and Modernity in Latin America* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000). Though this use of the term “globalization” for international sporting events occurring as early as the 1920s may strike some readers as inappropriate, I argue that such events in Mexico represented an early engagement with the modern transnational culture phenomenon of popular athletics.

⁶¹³ “Comentarios de Fray Nano,” *Afición*, 17 June 1936.

businessmen, Mexican-Americans who are not quite Mexican, but not quite American, and dishonest and materialistic *yanquis* who exploit Mexican talent. The protagonists are often self-sufficient Mexican workers turned athletes who from the *arrabales* (poor neighborhoods) of Mexico City rise to fame and (all too often) temporary wealth.⁶¹⁴ Boxers in this new media are portrayed as dramatic actors and symbols of masculine behavior who are repositories of positive and negative Mexican stereotypes.⁶¹⁵ For example, the Mexico City newspapers *Excelsior* and *Universal* covered the death of Paco Sotelo and the benefit match held in his honor at the *Arena Nacional*. The match was to raise funds for an elaborate monument for Sotelo's grave. The "best boxers of Mexico" had agreed to fight to raise money for the deceased boxer's family, but Sotelo senior, a man "who followed the bible and lived by the sweat of his brow" refused to accept charity.⁶¹⁶ In the space of weeks, the seventeen year old boxer and his family became representative of the "bravest Mexicans of all time," who proved that "A brave death is the most notable act a human can accomplish. All brave acts disappear in the face of a single cowardly

⁶¹⁴ The term "arrabal" literally means "slum." A subgenre of the Golden Age of Mexican cinema, *cine de arrabal*, portrayed the pulp fictions of Mexican urban life. The explosive growth of Mexico City following the Revolution had dramatically increased the population of the poor, peripheral areas of the city. In opposition to the middle-class melodrama films of the 1930s, Mexican directors like Alejandro Galindo (to be examined later) and Luis Buñuel (Spanish born, naturalized Mexican citizen) showed scenes of urban decay, violence, and complex transculturation that portrayed the *arrabales* as a locus of problematic modernization and Mexican popular culture. See: Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, *Mexican Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), p. 125.; Ernesto R. Acevedo-Muñoz, *Buñuel and Mexico: The Crisis of National Cinema*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); and Carl J. Mora, *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society, 1896 – 2004*, (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co, 2005). In Mora's work, he singles out a film I will examine in depth later in the chapter, *Campeón Sin Corona* (1945), as the first to employ "authentic street dialogue from the slums of Mexico City."

⁶¹⁵ The nature of boxing, I argue, with its emphasis on individual merit, perseverance, and "science" fused with primal violence, has made it a vehicle for narratives of national and class identities. Clifford Geertz provides a theoretical model for treating boxing as a cultural ritual see: Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cock Fight," in *Myth, Symbol, and Culture*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: Norton, 1971), pp. 1-37. One of the first transnational symbols of American urban underclass masculinity was the late nineteenth century Irish-American boxer John L. Sullivan. His importance as an American "masculine ideal" was popular topic in the period Latin American Press. See: Michael T. Isenberg, *John L. Sullivan and His America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Gaylyn Studlar, *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1996); Thomas Walter Herbert, *Sexual Violence and American Manhood* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2002) pp. 129-39; Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) and William H. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico*. Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

⁶¹⁶ "Hoy es la velada de box pro monumento a Sotelo," *Afición*, 20 June 1936.

moment. Bravery is for men, what virginity is for women.”⁶¹⁷ Sotelo, father and son, were representative Mexican men.

Rodolfo “Chango” Casanova, the “popular idol” and former ice cream salesman from Tepito become champion boxer, offered to box for free to raise money for Sotelo’s family.⁶¹⁸ A long list of pugilists from around Mexico had likewise agreed to waive their normal fee. *Excelsior* juxtaposed this as common decency, a very Mexican trait (*un rasgo muy nuestro*), to another boxer, Kid Azteca’s (Luis Villanueva) refusal to appear for free.⁶¹⁹ The observer implied that Azteca was acting un-Mexican and assailed the boxer as a parvenu, mocking him for being defeated by the more popular and lighter boxer, Chango Casanova.⁶²⁰ Not only was Casanova a better boxer and more generous with his talent within the community, he was humble and honored his working-class roots after his rise to fame. The reporter then drew on popular Mexican stereotypes of those who put on airs by disdaining even Mexican culinary nationalism: instead of tortillas, Azteca was one of those “boys who eats bread every day.”⁶²¹ Though Kid

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

⁶¹⁸ Tepito, a marginal neighborhood in the north of Mexico City, has often been portrayed as a symbol of lower-class Mexican urban identity. See: Tiziana Bertaccini, *Ficción y realidad del héroe popular* (Imágenes de México. México, D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2001). Casanova and other boxers still form a central place in Mexican popular memory of this era, they are posed as exemplars of Mexican perseverance and masculine behavior. See, for example, the hagiographic treatment of Casanova in: Pino Páez, *A solas en el altar: vida de Rodolfo Casanova, “El Chango”* [Alone on the Altar: Rodolfo Casanova, “El Chango”] (México, D.F.: Edamex, 1997).

⁶¹⁹ *Excelsior*, “Temas del Día,” 16 June 1935.

⁶²⁰ Casanova, the subject of the film *Campeón Sin Corona*, will be examined later in this chapter.

⁶²¹ This coded insult showed that Kid Azteca, despite coming from the same poor neighborhood as Casanova, had turned his back on working class Mexican identity. Two movies to be later examined in the chapter take up this theme through biographical sketches of both Casanova and Kid Azteca. The Mexican state in this era sought to pair “European” cuisine with cultural attainment and national progress through education at sites like the School of Arts and Trades for Women. See: Sandra Aguilar Rodríguez, “Cooking Modernity: Nutrition Policies, Class, and Gender in 1940s and 1950s Mexico” *The Americas*. 64, no. 2: 177-205; and: Jeffrey M. Pilcher *¡Que Vivan Los Tamales!: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998). As Eric Hobsbawm, in his work on social banditry, has argued that boxers and other popular heroes who come from the slums, like Kid Azteca, can be flashy and arrogant only so far and maintain their credibility in their community of origin: “Paradoxically, therefore, the conspicuous expenditure of the bandit, like the gold-plated Cadillac and diamond inlaid teeth of the slum boy who has become world boxing champion, serves to link him to his admirers and not separate them from them; providing always that he does not step too far outside the heroic role in which the

Azteca would go on to hold international boxing titles and represent Mexican virility abroad, he showed his lack of *Mexicanidad* by “asking for a god-like salary” when he “should have felt obligated to help his fellow professional’s family.”⁶²²

As Anne Rubenstein has shown, these types of portrayals (in this case nonfiction) served as didactic lessons to Mexican readers about the roles and responsibilities of Mexicans who had successfully manipulated the few opportunities open to them in a rapidly modernizing and urbanizing period.⁶²³ Similar to books on etiquette, these narratives showed Mexicans the dangers of success and the permissible public behaviors required of socially mobile members of the marginal classes. Through the dissemination of mass culture, the creation of athletes in Mexican iconography helped to enshrine the bootstrapping boxer as a tragic embodiment of changing *mexicanidad*. Athletic contests as merit-based, universally rule driven, and (ideally) governed by fair-play, gave working-class Mexicans a perceived avenue of personal advancement both within and beyond the country. This advancement, however, was to be governed by certain cultural rules of behavior if successful individuals were to maintain public approval.⁶²⁴

people have cast him.” Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels; Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971),p. 22-23.

⁶²² Ibid., *Excelsior*, “Temas del Día.” Mexican popular memory has, however, been kind to the legacy of Kid Azteca.

⁶²³ In what is perhaps a well-meaning exaggeration, Rubenstein writes “As surprising as students of Antonio Gramsci may find it, the interpretive communities gathered around popular culture *were* Mexican civil-society in this era.” Anne Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

⁶²⁴ Scholars of the post-Revolutionary period are split over the content and even the existence of a unitary national culture. Recently, Alan Knight has critiqued the “many Mexicos” thesis put forth by anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla. According to Bonfil and historian Luis González y González, Mexico is best understood as a series of separate entities, be they regions, states, or villages. Historian Steve Stern has argued that examination of various cultural trends reveals deep underlying commonalities in the Mexican experience (since the colonial era), while Alan Knight posits that national culture is a product of the post-Revolutionary rise in consumer culture that was greatly aided by new forms of mass media. This study finds most evidence to support Knight’s thesis, as cultural mediators in the popular press drew on extant Mexican tradition to teach lessons from within a modernizing context. In a theoretical vein, this study agrees with the ideas put forth by Jorge Larraín that national identity should be

Civil Society versus Government: Boxing and Popular Culture

Boxing as blood sport, despite and perhaps because of its popularity, was disdained by the Mexican government as an anti-social behavior to be replaced by team sports like basketball and baseball. As Mary Kay Vaughan has shown, the Revolutionary Mexican state used educational literature and radio programs to dissuade rural Mexicans from engaging in cockfighting, bullfighting and boxing.⁶²⁵ Preferable pastimes like baseball and basketball were encouraged in attempts to lead the masses away from the brutalizing effects of more violent sports and to instill the values of “health and sobriety.”⁶²⁶ Despite these attempts by the Mexican state, civil society clearly operated with greater autonomy than strict government control over cultural preferences would indicate. Modern Mexicans, in mass, spent their earnings to view such blood sports and evinced preferences that resisted legislation and state centered educational objectives. The mass media brought them daily news of sport, the more dramatic the better.⁶²⁷

As early as 1910, Mexican newspapers following their counterparts in the United States and

situated in between the two poles of constructivism and essentialism. Larrain calls this in between area “historical structural.” Boxing, and modern sport in general, were features of Western European and American modernity and their importation into Latin America challenged extant formulations of popular culture, masculinity, and identity. They transformed these features, rather than created them anew. Negotiation is an overused but useful term to describe this process whereby the new is grafted and digested into the extant. See: Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México profundo* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1987); Luis González y González, *Invitación a la microhistoria* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1973); Alan Knight, “Revolutionary Project, Recalcitrant People: 1910-1940,” in *The Revolutionary Process in Mexico*, ed. Jaimie Rodríguez O. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); and Jorge Larrain, *Identity and Modernity in Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), pp. 34-42.

⁶²⁵ Mary K. Vaughan, *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 160. This characterization of boxing alongside “traditional” Mexican pastimes implies the established presence and yet the problematic nature of boxing culture even in the Mexican countryside in this period. Boxing matches were taxed under the same category as gambling as an activity that was *nocivos* (harmful).

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁶²⁷ For example, the January 1 1936 match between the Mexican “boxing idol” Rodolfo “Chango” Casanova and the American Freddie Miller that took place in El Toreo, was attended by between 25 and 30,000 Mexicans. Public engagement with the lead up to the match and the media coverage of the event made it an important moment in popular memory. Newspapers published drawings, pictures, vignettes and brief biographies of the opponents. Thousands attended their training camps. See: *Excelsior*, 30 December 1935, 31 December 1935, 1-3 January 1936; *Universal* 31 December 1935, 1-4 January 1936; *Ottawa Citizen*, 2 January 1936. The match took place in the largest public spectator venue in Mexico City, a bullring. All cheap seats (Sol) for the event were sold-out while only a handful of the more expensive seats (Sombra) remained.

English-language newspapers published in Mexico, like *The Mexican Herald*, dedicated “Sport” sections where increasingly voluminous coverage of international trends and athletic events informed the public of distant and seemingly detached events.⁶²⁸ Hybrid publications, like *Arte y Sport* (1919) were among the first Mexican media to engage the newly emergent demand for transnational information of sport culture. Sport was paired with poetry, musical compositions and essays on high culture. By the end of the 1920s, however, sport fans in Mexico had their own dedicated newspapers and magazines like *Afición* (1930) and *Ring* (1936). Such novel publications styled themselves as bettering agents for Mexican society as a whole. Their pages carried such lofty statements as “In the practice of sport lies the salvation of the race.”⁶²⁹ Weekly magazines, responding to both increased demand and the frequent enactment of sporting contests in Mexico, shifted from weekly to daily issues, covering both “Toros y Deportes.”⁶³⁰

These novel manifestations of civil society both complimented and ran counter to official government projects to inculcate sport as component of modern Mexican identity. Keith Brewster, in his essay on the post-Revolutionary governments’ attempts to incorporate amateur sport into the comprehensive narrative of progressive *mexicandiad* and popular culture, gives clear evidence of state initiatives to educate and civilize rural Mexicans by encouraging the celebration of national holidays through the secular practice of sport. Athletics figured into local political struggles as villagers communicated directly with President Lázaro Cardenas to plea for the creation and preservation of sport fields for the purpose of “patriotic activities.” Brewster reproduces a choreographed script for Revolution Day in the early 1940s to show the theatrical and highly symbolic use of organized amateur sport as a panacea for number of perceived social

⁶²⁸ The pioneer of modern journalism in Mexico, *El Imparcial*, had a sport section beginning in 1908.

⁶²⁹ *Afición*, 22 July 1942, p. 4

⁶³⁰ This dual coverage of traditional Mexican pastimes, bullfighting, and the novel import of modern competitive sport made it an arbiter of both established culture and emergent Mexican association with both domestic and international trends in popular athletics.

ills in rural Mexico. When tennis is introduced into an inebriated and violent rural milieu via the white-clad teachers of sport, all social disorder is quelled due to cooperative community engagement in the game.⁶³¹ Out of the confusion emerges a robust, white-clad couple who represent the end product of collective practice of modern sport.

Central to these attempts are state control and initiative to educate what is represented through official state channel as dangerous and backward behaviors that form Mexican national culture. While this explanation of elite attempts to reform behaviors that supposedly threaten order has a considerable historiographical tradition, this study looks to those spaces in which state policy had little discernable impact. The subculture of boxing was a relatively autonomous component of Mexican national identity that rejected or ignored official state rhetoric and, as Carlos Monsivais has argued, “[made] possible and extended that minimal democratic space that the rest of us inhabit,” civil society and the public sphere.⁶³²

In the early 1920s, the checkered legality of boxing was replaced by the first substantial attempts at state intervention and regulation.⁶³³ The Mexican government founded the *Comisión de Box* (Boxing Commission) to regulate and profit through taxation and licensing fees on the sport. By 1930, over five hundred licenses for professional boxers had been granted, signifying for many the final end to the popularity of bullfighting.⁶³⁴ The *Ayuntamiento* turned to journalists as those most knowledgeable about the international norms that governed boxing and asked for

⁶³¹ Brewster, *Patriotic Pastimes*.

⁶³² Carlos Monsivais, *Mexican Postcards* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), p. 23.

⁶³³ As shown in Chapter One, boxing’s illegality during the Porfiriato was largely contingent on what class engaged in it. While Díaz himself attended boxing matches during patriotic celebrations, he also dispatched federal soldiers to stop an 1896 match from taking place for fear it would damage Mexican “civilization.” By the late 1920s, the Mexican Boxing Commission negotiated with other international organizations on rules and regulations to govern the sport.

⁶³⁴ *Revista Pan-Americana*, Vol. 43 [1930], p. 206; Luis G. Franco, *Glosa del período de gobierno del C. Gral. e Ing. Pascual Ortiz Rubio, 1930-1932*. (México, 1948).

sports writers' assistance in drafting legislation to cover the "enormously popular" sport.⁶³⁵ Conservative social critics like the intellectual Fernando Gamboa, acting in his capacity as director of the Cultural and Artistic Advisory Board of Mexico City (a censorship board) pressed the government to ban boxing, or at least to regulate the *malas artes* employed by controversial boxers like Patricio Martínez Arredondo in the early 1920s.⁶³⁶ Gamboa inveighed against the *Ayuntamiento* for granting a license for two children, whose fighting names were Baby Dempsey and Baby Carpentier (after the American and French boxers then making headlines) to box for profit.⁶³⁷ He argued his case by admitting that the state needed legislation to cover boxing; but that in extreme cases, such as this, the rules of Public Diversions against the exploitation of children should be sufficient to prohibit future "shames" of this sort.⁶³⁸ The licensing office weakly justified its actions by citing the poverty of the two children involved.

The early 1920s witnessed a qualitative change in the rhetoric surrounding boxing in Mexico. While nationalist intellectuals like Gamboa still felt that boxing was barbaric, the nature of their protests did not question the presence of boxing in public life. This change was reinforced by police presence and incipient regulation at all licensed matches. In 1923, an irate Police Inspector, Pedro Gómez, complained to the *Ayuntamiento* that the crowds at boxing matches were getting out of control and that he would be unwilling to risk the safety of the

⁶³⁵ Correspondence: Mexico City *Ayuntamiento* to Fernando Manuel Campos, Offices of the Newspaper *El Universal*, 2 March 1922, AHDF: Fondo Secretaría General Licencias, Vol. 3960, Exp. 34.

⁶³⁶ There is surprisingly little known about the constitution or actions of this organization at the end of the Revolutionary Period. Given the fact that it served as a clearing house for cultural and artistic events and pressed the government for censorship of many acts deemed "anti-Mexican" it would be a fruitful area for future study. In Gambo's diary, he lists daily sessions in which the members of the advisory board debated risqué plays, boxing and cinema on the merits of decency. Federico Gamboa and José Emilio Pacheco, *Memorias mexicanas* (México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1996). See also: Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México, 1896-1930* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1983); Patrice Elizabeth Olsen, *Artifacts of Revolution: Architecture, Society, and Politics in Mexico City, 1920-1940* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

⁶³⁷ F. Gamboa to *Ayuntamiento*, 5 August 1922; AHDF: Fondo Secretaria General Licencias, Vol. 3961, Exp. 101.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*

officers under his command by continuing to require them to work boxing matches.⁶³⁹ These public “spectacles” attracted a distasteful element of the population who were easily angered, to the point of violence, when they felt that the quality of the boxers performing in front them did not merit the price paid for tickets. Gómez did not ask that boxing matches be stopped, though he found them distasteful, but that the government step up its regulation to provide the public with “better quality boxers.”⁶⁴⁰ With the daily press coverage and tens of thousands of Mexicans flocking to see local and foreign boxers, the city government sought to tame the crowd, not to remove the reason for its excitement. Much had changed since 1910.

This suggests that the Mexican state had come to terms with the once illegal behavior and that changing cultural practices once associated with the United States had become commonplace. These regulatory actions were also the result of a transnational pattern: boxing had become legal in most of the United States, and Cuba, Argentina, Chile, Peru, had moved to establish internationally recognized rules that governed the sport as their own.⁶⁴¹ This chapter examines representations and the interrelation of popular culture, national and transnational identities, and memory embodied in the mediated images of boxers and boxing. I first explore the public rhetoric in three widely distributed newspapers from Mexico City surrounding the challenges to racial superiority and Mexican modernity in the context of the transnational events of September 14, 1923. That evening, the Argentine Luis Ángel Firpo, the “Wild Bull of the Pampas,” represented Latin American “virility” versus the American champion Jack Dempsey.⁶⁴² Though Firpo was not Mexican, the vast majority of the reportedly hundreds of thousands of Mexican readers and listeners who followed the event adopted him as a symbol of

⁶³⁹ Pedro Gómez, Police Inspector to *Ayuntamiento*, 8 February 1923.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴¹ Rodríguez, *The Regulation of Boxing*; Arne K. Lang, *Prizefighting: An American History* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co, 2008); Sugden. *Boxing and Society*.

⁶⁴² For the parallel impact of the match in Cuba, see Chapter Three.

their regional and national characteristics: the “faith,” placed in Firpo bordered on the irrational, as Mexican gamblers ignored widespread reports on his odds of victory, even the advice of American *peritos* (experts). The Mexican public was presented with the image of the “raza latina” in combat with one of the foremost symbols of American manhood, the “Manassas Mauler,” Jack Dempsey.⁶⁴³ Firpo became a folk hero throughout Latin America as a result of his unsuccessful challenge to American dominance.⁶⁴⁴ Mexican cultural commentators used the 1923 title bout as an opportunity to compare their “national character,” and racial identity to other Latin Americans and Americans by internalizing a transnational moment in popular culture to portray the attainments of Mexican modernity. Not only was the knowledge necessary to understand modern sport a much commented upon sign of cultural progress, the technological means through which almost instantaneous news of the outside world entered into Mexican society created new social challenges. During these events, the Mexican state was conspicuously absent; I argue that the transnational media played an integral role in constructing popular culture in this period, sometimes despite the efforts of the centralizing state.

The second series of case studies, introduced above, examines Raúl Talán’s two popular memoirs written about boxing in 1920s-30s Mexico City and is followed by a brief examination of two widely distributed hagiographic movies about Mexican boxers, Rodolfo “Chango” Casanova and Luis “Kid Azteca” Villanueva.⁶⁴⁵ Along with radio, film and popular literature

⁶⁴³ International media coverage of this event was largely manipulated by Dempsey’s manager, Doc Kearns. It was one of the first athletic media events of such scale. See: Garry Whannel, *Media Sport Stars: Masculinities and Moralities* (London: Routledge, 2002) and Richard V. McGehee, 1996. “The Dandy and the Mauler in Mexico: Johnson, Dempsey, Et Al., and the Mexico City Press, 1919-1927”. *Journal of Sport History*. 23, no. 1: 20.

⁶⁴⁴ Though unsuccessful in his attempt to win the world heavyweight title, Firpo was celebrated in poetry, songs, and by then President of Argentina as a national hero to be emulated by Argentine youth. A Salvadoran soccer team was named after him.

⁶⁴⁵ *Campeón Sin Corona*, Directed by Pedro Gallindo (1945) and *El Gran Campeón*, Directed by Chano Urueta (1949).

were focal points for the public dissemination of Mexican national identity.⁶⁴⁶ These two films were intended to both entertain and inform a popular audience by drawing on the images of national “heroes” as they confronted adversity in the form of American culture and their own impoverished backgrounds. They are parables of Mexican success in a competitive, transnational environment.

Through these popular representations of *mexicanidad*, I argue that the advent of mass consumer culture in Mexico and the creation of nationally identifiable masculine symbols combined with the affective power of constant imagery of transnational athletes and celebrities created the process through which prizefighting became a symbolic site for the interpretation and dissemination of modern Mexican popular culture. Boxing as an import was nationalized through language and imagery that often appealed to traditional values and gender roles. It was simultaneously used as a vehicle to teach the preferable manners in which to be modern consumers of culture and how to be a modern man. Essayists wrote in eugenic terms and pleaded with the Mexican public to understand that urbanization and modernization demanded that men train their bodies like those in other “civilized nations.”⁶⁴⁷ Unlike other “authentic” Mexican phenomenon like *lucha libre*, pugilism was simultaneously local and transnational: readers learned of Sotelo’s funereal games alongside cartoon images of the African-American boxer Joe Louis and his 1936 match with the German boxer Max Schmeling. International racial dramas like this prizefight between the boxing idol of Nazi Germany and an African-American,

⁶⁴⁶ Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies and Other Threats to the Nation*.

⁶⁴⁷ Antonio Zozaya, “Los Luchadores,” *El Informador*, 20 March 1920.

mediated into popular culture, distilled complex processes through the popular medium of competitive sport.⁶⁴⁸

“Firpo Carries the Hopes of the Race in his Hands:” How a Boxing Match in New York Was Used to Gauge Mexican Identity.⁶⁴⁹

Our temperament, always conditioned to follow whatever is fashionable, influences progress in the intensification of pugilism in Mexico, and so we have seen that in schools, in shops, in factories, in the home, boxing predominates, and even the newspaper criers in the street, thinking themselves diminutive Firpos and Dempseys, fight their world-wide matches bare knuckled....Boxing, like bullfighting, will always live in Mexico.⁶⁵⁰

On the evening of September 14, 1923, a Friday, a former miner and hobo from Colorado met a one-time pharmacy bathroom attendant and stevedore from Buenos Aires at the Polo Grounds in New York City to compete for the racial supremacy of Latin America versus North America.⁶⁵¹ These were the terms of engagement that were daily news across the world in the weeks leading up the boxing match between Jack Dempsey and Luis Ángel Firpo, tellingly nicknamed the “Wild Bull of the Pampas.” Nowhere did this global event have more resonance than in Latin America. Biographical details, pictures, and illustrations of both men: their blood

⁶⁴⁸ Rivalries like the one between Joe Louis and Max Schmeling have produced several narrative histories that trace the language and symbolism employed by opposing sides to illustrate the reaction of civil society to events that, the authors argue, are of transcendent historical importance. The continued resonance of these events shows their relevance as a means of understanding complex past events. In this case, the matches were widely hailed as a proving ground for Nazi racial supremacy. See: David Margolick, *Beyond Glory: Joe Louis Vs. Max Schmeling, and a World on the Brink* (New York: Knopf, 2005); and Louis Erenberg, *The Greatest Fight of Our Generation*. For scholarly accounts of *lucha libre*, see: Heather Levi, *The World of Lucha Libre: Secrets, Revelations, and Mexican National Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

⁶⁴⁹ *Universal*, 8 September 1923; Augusto Tamayo Vargas, *Puerto pobre* (Lima: Editorial Galaxia, 1979).

⁶⁵⁰ *El Demócrata*, 9 September 1923.

⁶⁵¹ The Argentine historian José Speroni, argued that this bout, despite Firpo’s loss, was a formative moment for the construction of modern Argentine national identity. This case study extends this conclusion by examining the public reactions of the Mexican press and their appropriation of the event in to critique Mexican society. José Speroni, “Firpo-Dempsey: el combate del siglo,” in *Todo Es Historia* 1:6 (October 1967): 26-32; cited in Eric Dunning, Joseph A. Maguire, and Robert E. Pearton. *The Sports Process: A Comparative and Developmental Approach*. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1993).

lineages, their musculature, and their faces crowded news of earthquakes, shootings, and politics in the international press. In Mexico, the distant prizefight was made present and relevant through the intensity of local emotional engagement that was commented upon by the Mexico City press. The match was a moment in which cultural mediators gauged Mexican identity, masculinity and progress toward appropriating and deploying the symbols of modern urban society.⁶⁵²

Given the international importance placed on the bout in the lead-up and aftermath, its actuation was most remarkable for its brevity, less than four minutes, and the enormous amount of revenue it created. Firpo was knocked out within the first minute of the second round after having been battered to the canvas ten times in the space of less than four minutes. By all accounts it was a tenacious yet futile showing for the lightly skilled Argentine versus the American world champion.⁶⁵³ Gate receipts alone from the roughly 90,000 spectators totaled over a million dollars, a sum that amazed or disgusted most Latin American commentators.

⁶⁵² Even José Vasconcelos was a proponent of modern physical culture, though his nationalistic impulses were complicated by looking abroad to such organizations as the YMCA for examples to incorporate in Mexico. Best known as Secretary of Education for his massive initiatives against illiteracy and in favor of basic education for all Mexicans, he also oversaw the 1923 foundation of the General Directory of Physical Education, whose project of corporeal regeneration was officially presented as “one of the most important factors of national reconstruction.” Vasconcelos was suspicious of commercialized sport, however, largely because he argued that the pursuit of “records” indicative of individual achievement ran contrary to the community/nation building impulse of disinterested cooperation in team sports. The practice of sport was to be an element of hygiene along with cleanliness and proper nutrition, not a means of making heroes and amassing wealth. The first director of physical education was Jose F. Peralta, who had been educated in the United States and was associated with the YMCA movement. His experience in the United States weighed heavily on the orientation of Mexican physical education as seen in this passage from Vasconcelos: “.el *team work*, del que hablan los yanquis, y el espíritu de sacrificio en el triunfo; la lealtad para perder de que nos hablan los especialistas, y también la vieja lección de los greigos, el disfrute de belleza que hay en el atletismo. Además, la actitud Cristiana que busca vencer con el deporte la sensualidad. See: José Vasconcelos and Alicia Molina, *Antología de textos sobre educación* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1981); and María de la Luz Torres Hernández, “La educación física en el proyecto de cultura nacional posrevolucionaria: vasconcelismo y cardenismo,” in *Reencuentro* (México D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma Metropolitana, 1993).

⁶⁵³ The film of the bout, which was exported and shown all over Latin America, shows a number of fouls committed by Dempsey that, most commentators agreed, should have resulted in the victory being awarded to Firpo.

From New York, Tex Rickard the legendary boxing promoter had pitched the match as a highly theatrical event in the American and international press and manipulated worldwide attention: he even succeeded in influencing self-representations in some of the most masculine and working class venues in Mexico: *pulquerías*.⁶⁵⁴ Carlton Beals, the radical American journalist, along with others resident in Mexico City at the time, remarked that some *pulquerías* changed their names to celebrate the legacy of Firpo as a masculine symbol and a challenger to American dominance in the prize ring.

“ When Firpo fought Dempsey the first reports gave the Argentinian [sic] bruiser the victory. The local crowds were delirious with enthusiasm. At the time, I was teaching in a little school in the poverty-stricken Colonia Vallejo. The owner of the pulque shop there had hastened to repaint the name of his establishment, even before the final returns came in: ‘Firpo Won,’ and so it remained defiantly for years.”⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵⁴ *Pulquerías* were bars where *pulque*, an alcoholic beverage fermented from the maguey cactus, were sold. Throughout colonial and modern Mexican history, they have been sites where the urban poor congregated to imbibe and socialize. Though they are increasingly scarce today, in 1923 they were a controversial embodiment of popular culture and were often commented upon by travelers and journalists as a quintessential Mexican institution with their colorful and picaresque wall paintings and titles. As Pablo Piccato has shown, *pulquerías* were a focal point of legislative attempts to regulate the behavior of lower class Mexicans. See: Pablo Piccato, *City of Suspects: Crime in Mexico City, 1900-1931* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001). They were often scenes of crime and violence that threatened Porfirian and later Revolutionary social order. Several writers living in Mexico at the time remembered that a few *pulquerías*, reacting to the popular admiration and “racial” connection to Luis Ángel Firpo, renamed their businesses in his honor, sometimes humorously. Carlton Beals, the radical journalist who wrote prolifically about Latin America, in the 1920s and 30s remembered seeing a *pulquería* whose owner renamed it after the much hoped for Firpo victory, “Firpo Ganó.” Another observer, writing in 1932, remembered another *pulquería* named “I Feel Like Firpo,” this was a humorous title likely meaning that the effect of the pulque made one feel like Firpo after being knocked out by Dempsey. See: Leone Blakemore Moats and Russell Lord, *Thunder in Their Veins; A Memoir of Mexico* (New York: The Century co., 1932).; Salomay Lauderdale Harrison, *México simpático, tierra de encantos* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Co, 1929).; and Carleton Beals, *Glass Houses, Ten Years of Free-Lancing* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1938). The promoter Tex Rickard had also advertised the Jack Johnson versus Jim Jefferies match of July 4, 1910. Like the Firpo-Dempsey match, this bout was expressed for popular consumption in terms of the white race’s attempt to take back racial supremacy in the prize ring. Following Johnson’s victory, race riots erupted in a number of cities across the United States, fight films were banned in half-dozen countries, and Rickard expressed dismay over the outcome of his promotional theme of racial confrontation. Thirteen years elapsed before he again used the language of race to bolster public spending and attention before the Dempsey-Firpo match. Rickard was a source of fascination for both Latin American and American audiences. His manipulation of fighters paired with discomfort about his enormous profit from such events. For a popular autobiography on Rickard see: “Tex” Rickard, and Arch Oboler. *Everything Happened to Him: The Story of Tex Rickard* (New York: Stokes, 1936) and a biography, Charles Samuels, *The Magnificent Rube: The Life and Gaudy Times of Tex Rickard* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957). Tex Rickard likely understood the effect of his rhetoric in Argentina, as he had lived there, owning a massive cattle operation in the 1910s. see: “Tex Rickard Lord Over 50,000 Cattle” *New York Times*, 10 April 1915.

⁶⁵⁵ Carleton Beals, “The Magic that Won the Realm,” in *Scribner’s*, Vol. 100, no. 4: (October, 1936), p. 90.

How and why did two men, paid well to pummel each other in front of a crowd of 90,000 aficionados in New York City, hold the attention of Mexicans who had only recently been exposed to the “virile sport?” International commercial athletics, and boxing in particular, had since the turn of the century occupied an increasingly visible niche in Mexican constructions of the outside world. Successful incorporation of sport into national culture was seen as a constituent factor of modern nations and advanced cultures.⁶⁵⁶ The 1923 match marked a watershed not only in the popular consumption of cosmopolitan news, but in the technologies which disseminated global events into the popular imagination.⁶⁵⁷ Newspapers reacted to public enthusiasm and demand for the bout, publishing over 1,100 column inches dedicated to boxing and the views of dozens of Mexican, American, and Argentine commentators on possible outcomes for the events to take place in the Polo Grounds in New York.⁶⁵⁸

In Mexico City, the cigarette company *El Buen Tono* issued the first commercial radio broadcast in Mexican history, relaying to the “hundreds of thousands” of “anxious” Mexicans the round-by-round details of the drama.⁶⁵⁹ The technological novelty of broadcast news competed

⁶⁵⁶ See Chapter One.

⁶⁵⁷ Recent observers like the historian of Latin American sport J. Arbena have posited that in the late twentieth century the saturation of Latin American media, print and broadcast, with foreign sport activities should be the subject of further study. This mass importation of the details of sport and physical culture that Arbena recognized began much earlier in the twentieth century and Mexican newspapers, for example, covered boxing matches that took place in the United States in the late nineteenth century. See: Joseph Arbena, “International Aspects of Sport in Latin America: Perceptions, Prospects, and Proposals,” in Eric Dunning, Joseph A. Maguire, and Robert E. Pearton, *The Sports Process: A Comparative and Developmental Approach* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1993).

⁶⁵⁸ Richard McGehee, “The Dandy and the Mauler in Mexico: Johnson, Dempsey, Et Al., and the Mexico City Press, 1919-1927,” *Journal of Sport History*. 23 (1996), no. 1: 20, p. 28.

⁶⁵⁹ *El Buen Tono*, established during the Porfiriato, was a manufacturer of cigarettes and cigars and was one of Mexico’s first stable mechanized industries. The company held a number of patents on its machines that were often slight redesigns of foreign imports. *El Bueno Tono* was also significant for its early role in graphic design, advertising, and for publishing one of the first series of popular graphic novels. Some of its advertisements used local boxers and other performers like Conde Koma (Yamato Maida), the Japanese Jiu-Jitsu practitioner, to show the supposedly virile effects of smoking its cigarettes. In 1923, it was run by Senator José J. Reynoso, who maintained his position as senator throughout his tenure at the company’s helm. See: María Eugenia Romero, José Mario Contreras Valdez, and Jesús Méndez Reyes, *Poder público y poder privado: gobierno, empresarios y empresas*,

with the more traditional telegraph services used by major local newspapers like *Excelsiór*, *El Demócrata*, and *El Universal*, all of which openly competed to bring the fastest news of the bout. Ringside announcers spoke directly to Mexicans who hustled to spread the news of Firpo's second round defeat, buying "extras" of newspapers that within minutes went to press with the disenchanting news of the Latin American's defeat. Mexicans from the peripheral areas around the metropolis who had come to the city to celebrate the one hundred and thirteenth anniversary of the *Grito de Dolores* gathered on street corners, stopping traffic, to watch the radiograms of the bout projected onto improvised screens.⁶⁶⁰ A reporter assigned to cover the manifestations of this seemingly distant and detached event in Mexico wrote that "the streets were full of people, in all parts, in theaters, cinemas, cafes, restaurants, cantinas, billiard halls, stores and meeting places, the point most debated and the topic of conversation was about boxing."⁶⁶¹ An illustrator filled nearly the entire front page of *El Demócrata* with imaginative renderings of nearly-naked Dempsey and Firpo in various pugilistic poses, ending with Firpo laying on his back, the referee standing over him for the final count.⁶⁶² These portraits were stylized creations that depicted muscular men in action, reminiscent of American pugilistic paintings by George Bellows, as Latin Americans in the new age of mass media consumed dramatic narratives from the margins of American culture.⁶⁶³

1880-1980 (México, D.F.: UNAM, Facultad de Economía, 2006) and Thelma Camacho Morfin *Imágenes de México: las historietas de el Buen Tono de Juan B. Urrutia, 1909-1912* (México, D.F.: Instituto Mora, 2002), p. .

⁶⁶⁰ The *Grito de Dolores* (Shout of Dolores), of September 16, 1810 signaled the beginning of Mexico's war for independence against Spain. Its anniversary is celebrated every year when the President of Mexico shouts "Long live Mexico," from a balcony of the Presidential palace in the center of Mexico City.

⁶⁶¹ *El Demócrata*, 15 September 1923, pp. 1, 5.

⁶⁶² *El Demócrata*, 10 September 1923.

⁶⁶³ George Bellows and other members of the "Ashcan School" produced images of the American masculine subculture of boxing, gambling, and other disreputable pursuits. They followed the work of Thomas Eakins, who found boxing to be a visually rich and unique subject matter to portray images of urban U.S. culture. It was amid these multiple visual and literary interpretations that the culture of boxing spread to Latin America via the cultural intermediaries of the media.

The popular fascination with this theatrical event taking place over 2,000 miles away was an opportunity for Mexican cultural mediators to look outward as a means of looking inward: to apply their interpretations of the significance of modern physical culture and the cultivation of the Mexican male body. It was a focal point in which malleable ideas of race, the United States, and Mexican identity were interrogated through vivid narratives, cultural commentaries, and debates about the preferable content and representation of Mexican and “Latin” culture and progress. Detached from the rhetoric of social engineers like José Vasconcelos and Manuel Peralta, journalists and editorialists gleaned details of the lead up, actuation, and outcome of the bout and in the process negotiated a wide range of ideological, nationalistic, and cultural issues. Central in their interpretations of this event was the language and ideas of positive eugenics. Journalists as cultural mediators appropriated the idea that the human body in the modern city was subject to the weakening and enervating tendencies of urban industrial life. They touted masculine role models like Firpo and Dempsey as exemplars of physical development and through the portrayal of public spectacles deployed didactic commentary that transferred the ideas of eugenic “science” to the popular arena where they had concrete and often alarming ramifications.⁶⁶⁴

The Latin American press and large segments of the population had been elated at this rare opportunity for a “racial” and “cultural” “brother” to compete on equal terms with a

⁶⁶⁴ For the intellectual appropriation and of European and American eugenics in Latin America during this period see Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 99. Stepan shows that the “elite embraced personal hygiene, sport and physical exercise as ‘eugenic.’” Eugenics, defined by historian Thomas F. Glick, as the “socially constructed application of genetics,” was deployed across Latin America as a means of racial “improvement,” before and during this period. The mainstream Mexican twist on positive eugenics in the 1920s followed the ideas of José Vasconcelos, who argued that the racial miscegenation of indigenous and European “races” had created a unique Mexican “type” that could be improved through conscious application of the ideas of racial bettering central to the normative science of positive eugenics. This was a “soft” science that focused on remedying social circumstance that led to racial decadence and lack of development, compared to the more rigid constructs of European and American ideas focused on hard “selectionism.” See: Thomas F. Glick, “Science in Twentieth Century Latin America,” in Leslie Bethell, *Ideas and Ideologies in Twentieth Century Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 287-361 .

representative of the United States. Opposing writers, sometimes published in the same newspaper issues simultaneously denigrated the entire enterprise of professional imported sport as grotesquely foreign and detrimental to public order while others praised the appropriation of boxing culture by Mexican youth as an opportunity to mold the Mexican bodies into more vigorous, productive and modern beings.⁶⁶⁵ While Mexican readers consumed daily reports about the temperament, eating habits, and even the clothes worn by Firpo and Dempsey, they went in the thousands to watch African-American journeyman fighters perform at *El Toreo* in the affluent *colonia La Condesa*.⁶⁶⁶ Members of the “beautiful sex,” if accompanied by a man, were to be given free tickets. Amateur boxers from athletic clubs and workers’ unions staged public bouts to show their mastery of modern sport and impresarios colluded with the Mexican government to lower ticket prices so that Mexican youths, both civilian and military, could witness professional boxers to learn the finer points of the “art.”⁶⁶⁷

More than simple entertainment, these local and transnational events were embedded in widespread fears that the Mexican “race” was a late-comer to the modern imperative to create competitive and self-sufficient bodies through the mastery of sport and physical education. Boxing had long been viewed by Latin American observers as a quintessential medium of American cultural modernity and the “devastating” loss of Firpo was a catalyst for commentaries on American treachery and unfairness.⁶⁶⁸ What should have been a means to compete on the sole basis of skill and achievement, sport, was manipulated to sustain American dominance in the face of a powerful Latin American. In the weeks after the bout, as details became available

⁶⁶⁵ “El cultivo de musculo” *El Demócrata*, 2 September 1923.

⁶⁶⁶ “Cylcone Turner,” *El Demócrata*, 2 September 1923.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁸ *Excelsior*, 12 September 1923; *Universal*, 11 September 1923.

and then the film of the match played in dozens of theaters in Mexico City, Mexicans debated the validity of sport as fair play.

Modern sport, it was widely concluded, was not the culprit and Mexican attempts to nationalize boxing continued in terms of the great benefits such discipline embodied for the progress of the nation. The portrayal of this and similar events both undermined and complemented the Mexican Revolutionary government's educational prerogatives to discipline and civilize the national body through implementation of sport programs in even the most remote areas of the country.⁶⁶⁹ Immediately after the bout, the Mexico City government agreed to lower the taxes charged on "that class of spectacles," in order to promote the diffusion of boxing as a necessary form of knowledge and cultural attainment for citizens of Mexico City. *El Demócrata* reported the attendance of the governor of the state of Mexico and the head of the Military College of San Jacinto who worked in collusion with the company of the Mexican promotor Baldomero Romero to popularize boxing in the capital:

The sport of boxing, which has been taken up with so much enthusiasm in Mexico, has had in the company that presents this spectacle a great element of encouragement, the great bouts have been so frequent in which true boxers have fought [that it is] developing a labor of physical culture that has been appreciated by the municipal and educational authorities such to give, due to its merit and effects, a lowering of the taxes that this type of shows must pay without any other reason than taking into account its cultural character in favor of the bettering of the race.⁶⁷⁰

This direct impact on politics and daily life in the form of taxation also extended to new vocabularies through with Mexicans understood themselves and their lives. "Dempsey" became synonymous with cheating as far away as Oaxaca, where boxing matches were held to celebrate

⁶⁶⁹ For an account of state programs to promote sport in Mexico see

⁶⁷⁰ *El Demócrata*, 25 September 1923.

Mexican Independence Day.⁶⁷¹ Mexico City however, remained the center of engagement and experimentation with modern commercial athletics.

Though most historiography on the use of sport as self-representation focuses on Mexico's hosting of the Olympic Games in 1968, I argue that the cultural debates that informed these attempts to portray Mexico as a participant in the modern cosmopolitan world had their roots even before the Mexican Revolution and that this engagement intensified in the 1920s.⁶⁷² Modern sport as a popular phenomenon cannot be disentangled from broader social and cultural processes that were salient at this moment. Dempsey and Firpo, like John L. Sullivan and Jack Johnson before them, were transnational exemplars of enviable human development, whose physicality was to be treated as equally important to the education of the intellect. Simultaneously, they represented problematic cultural traits and became screens onto which cultural mediators projected a range of issues.⁶⁷³ Editorialists argued that modern responsibilities of educators were "to develop in youth the same in physical strength as in intellect in order to invigorate the race, which in the current epoch has so many tendencies that make it more and more feeble."⁶⁷⁴

Mexicans, in the thousands, consumed written, visual, and aural accounts of the "fight of the century," and cultural critics appropriated the transnational drama as a context for salient public debates on race, modernity, and masculinity; they used modern sporting contests like this one to look both outward and inward and to gauge their progress, deficiencies, and hopes for the

⁶⁷¹ *El Demócrata*, 23 September 1923. In this account of a boxing match in the Juarez Theater of Oaxaca on September 16th, the writer under the pen name "Periquín Rascarabias

⁶⁷² See: Claire Brewster and Keith Brewster, *Representing the Nation: Sport and Spectacle in Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (New York: Routledge, 2010); David Wood and P. Louise Johnson, *Sporting Cultures: Hispanic Perspectives on Sport, Text and the Body* (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁶⁷³ For an exhaustive account of boxing in literature, art, social movements, and popular consciousness in the post-WWI era see: Kasia Boddy, *Boxing: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion, 2008).

⁶⁷⁴ *El Demócrata*, 20 September 1923, p. 7.

future of “the race.” The fight and its symbolism was a means to argue what, at the core, it meant to be and behave as a Mexican. It exposed explicit tensions between conservative thinkers who saw Mexican identity as expressed by fealty to traditional Mexican culture embodied in celebrations like *charro* festivals and those who saw Mexican potential in a simultaneously cosmopolitan and nationalistic adoption of foreign culture, like boxing. In the most basic terms, Mexicans argued that these global events did matter, and that the future of Mexico partly depended on how well modern Mexicans would manage and appropriate these foreign influences.

In his study on Mexican participation in nineteenth and twentieth century world’s fairs, Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo recognized the tensions between constructing nationalism and identity simultaneously between the exaltation (and idealization) of the characteristics of the nation within the context “cosmopolitan nationalism.” He further argues:

“..cultural, economic, and political nationalism was at odds with both cultural and political cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism was a model of modernity that simultaneously required the homogenization of all human characteristics and desires and recognized and appreciated the exotic and the bizarre. That was an insurmountable existential irony: an organized model of the world, and a fascination with what was not part of the model but which ought to be part of the picture of the modern world. In addition, the very national need to be cosmopolitan seemed to be in conflict with the requirement of being culturally and racially unique and, presumably, superior.”⁶⁷⁵

The relationship between looking outward and looking inward was constantly in flux and Mexican consumption and deployment of international sport was emblematic of this tension. Cultural critics in the Mexican media engaged this “existential irony” by appropriating the image of Luis Ángel Firpo as their own, identifying him as a standard bearer for a greater, though ill-defined, pan-Latin American and Mexican identity. As Tenorio-Trillo identified, sporting

⁶⁷⁵ Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World’s Fair: Crafting a Modern Nation*.

events in the age of the “massive appropriation of popular taste and consciousness,” became one of a series of symbolic displays used to express one’s place in the world and to register the forms of national progress in a cosmopolitan medium. By the early 1920s, international events like this boxing match had a clear impact on the construction of Mexican identity via the perceived standards of the outside world. These technological and cultural appropriations coincided with a “looseness of authority” in the 1920s that created opportunities for cultural creativity that would narrow with the advent of the nationalistic policies that began in the 1930s.⁶⁷⁶

The immediacy of this global event generated almost instantaneous reactions from the social class that, I argue, saw themselves as “wizards of progress.”⁶⁷⁷ Precisely in this period, newspapers ceased to be the only means of rapid mass communication. The radio initiated an era in communication that served to condense time and distance as Mexicans received news of far away events broadcast into their homes and traditional social centers. Mexican broadcast companies were exuberant over their successful appropriation of this new technology and congratulated themselves on the ability to better and more rapidly inform and entertain the masses in even the distant pueblos of Mexico. Receiving news of the outside world was advertised as a masculine pursuit that took place in hyper-masculine spaces like cantinas. The

⁶⁷⁶ Gauging this claim is, of course, problematic. I argue, along with Tenorio-Trillo, that the political disarray following the Revolution paired with the rapid artistic, cultural, and technological changes of the 1920s created a highly experimental environment. Diego Rivera and his socially conscious mural work is perhaps the best known example of the search for artistic and cultural styles in which to express a uniquely Mexican world view. I argue that this tendency toward experimentation and a relative open mindedness to new forms opened other relatively novel spaces. The urban, modern, and cosmopolitan fascination with sport and the massive media expansion of coverage in this era is, I argue, largely a result of this openness to novelty and embrace of the exotic. Mexican journalists, for example, consumed and imitated newspapers. See: Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World’s Fair*, p. 238;

⁶⁷⁷ I borrow the term from Tenorio-Trillo, who used this formulation to describe the Porfirian elite who sought to appropriate and deploy foreign ideas of progress and modernity. In his study on Mexican participation in several nineteenth and twentieth century world’s fairs, he argues that cosmopolitan minded elite sought to simultaneously present Mexico as a modern nation with great potential while learning from the cultural productions of Europe and the United States.

Firpo-Dempsey bout was communicated to the Mexican audience as an important moment in history, a crisis, with substantial quantities of racial pride riding on the outcome.



Figure 10: *El Demócrata*, 23 August 1923.



Figure 11: Jack Dempsey, publicity shot for Radio Cigarettes, Mexico City, circa 1925. Courtesy of the Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Enrique Díaz.

As Friedman has argued, in the presence of any crisis, real or perceived, the tools engaged to understand and manage a given circumstance are dependent on the ideas that are “laying around.”⁶⁷⁸ This case study examines the ideas that were “laying around” in the public sphere in Mexico after the tumultuous events of the Revolution. I argue that international sporting events were and are fabricated crises that create myths around archetypal characters that become cultural shorthand for salient social anxieties. Unlike most histories of this era, the Revolutionary state is de-centered from its usually dominant role as cultural mediator. The transnational events that elicited such wide-ranging commentary, in this case, were neither a product of the eagle or the virgin: the state or traditional Mexican culture. The engagement of worldwide phenomenon of sport is a little recognized means to examine the dissemination of cosmopolitan relationships that increasingly formed the daily lives of Mexicans in this era.

José Juan Tablada: A Decades Long Engagement with the Virile Sport

The day after the Firpo-Dempsey bout, José Juan Tablada, the cosmopolitan modernist poet, wrote his philosophical impressions of the global event as a foreign correspondent in New York. Tablada, as shown in Chapter One, gained notoriety toward the end of the Porfiriato as a cultural commentator, poet, and representative of Mexican cultural attainment abroad.⁶⁷⁹ In the

⁶⁷⁸ “Only a crisis—actual or perceived—produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around.” Quoted in: Marie-Luisa Frick and Andreas Oberprantacher. *Power and Justice in International Relations: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Global Challenges* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009). The boxing match under examination constituted a crisis that was constructed to in a manner to foment (and it did so) a real crisis in identity. Mexicans and other Latin Americans chose sides based on their contemporary assessments of racial, cultural and national identity. In the varied responses to Firpo’s loss, these identifications remained constant, and cultural commentators creatively sought to soften the blow of such disappointment by rationalizing reasons for the failure, even turning it on its head to argue that Firpo was the moral victor.

⁶⁷⁹ Tablada’s work, for example, was incorporated into official representations of Mexico abroad. Though he lived a large portion of his life in self-exile in the United States, his cosmopolitan intellect was touted by the Mexican government as an example of cultural attainment. As Tenorio-Trillo has shown, his writing received a prize at the

early twentieth century, his fascination with modern physical culture had led to an engagement with the transnational world of modern sport and he had boxed and served as a trainer for several disreputable Mexico City bouts. As a young writer he had challenged official prohibitions of prizefighting and emergent physical culture, arguing in favor of their introduction and dissemination among the *juventud dorada* as a bettering factor for the nation as a whole. Tablada's career had spanned the era in which increasingly rapid international communication had transformed the dissemination and consumption of knowledge of the outside world and he was uncomfortable with the notoriety and wealth attained by popular heroes like Jack Dempsey who he viewed as unintelligent and undeserving.

Tablada, writing from New York for the Mexico City newspaper *Excelsior*, relayed to Mexican readers his disdain for what he saw as the brutalizing commercial exploitation of the blood-thirsty masses.⁶⁸⁰ Observing the emergence of mass culture in New York, he feared the spread of such spectacles to Mexico. He used Firpo's loss as an opportunity to engage the low-high culture divide and to chastise American and Latin American society in general and those in particular who succumbed to the temptation to see racial superiority as a driving force in such instances of low culture. He summed up his reaction to the bout in the title of his editorial "Dempsey, the most brutal man in the world."⁶⁸¹ Though in Tablada's mind, Dempsey and the boxing promoter Tex Rickard shared guilt for the cultural debasement, it was the ignorant and brutal masses, willing to spend their scarce incomes on such barbarous displays of brute force, which should most be viewed with the greatest suspicion.

1929 Ibero-American World's Fair in Seville. Along with Federico Gamboa, Tablada from early in his career during the Porfiriato, sought to experience and relay the modern urban experience of Mexico City. By the time of the 1923 bout, Tablada had reappraised his early fascination with pugilism in favor a more conservative, high culture disdain for the bloodsport as an atavist and dehumanizing pursuit. Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fair*, p. 234.

⁶⁸⁰ José Juan Tablada, "Dempsey, el hombre más bruto del mundo" *Excelsior*, 14 September 1923.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Fundamental to this attitude was an appraisal of modern commercialized sport as an unskilled and “troglydyte” pursuit that was a blemish on an otherwise praiseworthy American culture. Though he argued that the terms of racial superiority used to advertise the bout were a trap used to ensnare thoughtless observers, he succumbed to the this very temptation to describe why Americans were adept at the practice; “It is because boxing is a sport that is absolutely Saxon, suitable for the qualities of the cold, prudent and calculating race.”⁶⁸² American society, he argued, contained a number of qualities that were worthy of imitation; but “Neither have the triumphs of Dempsey made me admire this nation that I do admire and envy for the libraries, the museums, certain civic and social virtues and some of its poets who were much less popular than Dempsey...”⁶⁸³ The low culture of boxing was clearly a hereditary vice of the Saxon races that should be criticized by discerning observers.

Tablada, in keeping with his cosmopolitan orientation, compared boxing to other similar pursuits he had witnessed in the course of his extensive travels and residence abroad. Coming of age toward the end of the Porfiriato, Tablada had imbibed the positivist impulses of the Mexican elite and had occupied minor positions in the Porfirian and Huerta governments.⁶⁸⁴ Tablada chose the losing side in the Mexican Revolution, backing Huerta as “warrior of the ages,” and was forced into exile in New York.⁶⁸⁵ Always looking outward to define and critique Mexican order and progress, his writing represents an intellectual’s attempt to reconcile Mexico with the outside world. For Tablada, “Intelligence” was the key issue when critiquing any human activity, including modern sport, which he found dangerously close to the brutality of the Roman

⁶⁸² Ibid.

⁶⁸³ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁴ See Chapter One.

⁶⁸⁵ José Juan Tablada was an astute cultural commentator who deserves more scholarly attention. On his time in New York and difficulties with the Revolutionary Government see: Rubém Lozano Herrera, *José Juan Tablada en Nueva York: búsqueda y hallazgos en la crónica* (México: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2000).

Circus. His comparisons were explicit: “There is not in this sport any intelligence as there is in Latin fencing or in Japanese jiu-jitsu.”⁶⁸⁶ The preferences of the masses for spectacles like boxing, he argued, was an impediment to positive cultural change and he lamented the representation of this match as a “cosmic catastrophe” similar in scale to the recent earthquakes in Japan.⁶⁸⁷ “I detest the troglodytic and gregarious spirit because of which the cultural spirit, the true, the artistic and free, fights desperately to improve and be recognized as a social end, and in contrast, the uncivilized and stolid pugilist is acclaimed and idolized to fanaticism, ignominiously.” As an avid consumer of popular media, Tablada was exposed to voluminous dissemination of pugilistic journalism that was the most written about and discussed form of modern sport coverage in the 1920s press.⁶⁸⁸ The celebration of the brutal in place of the elevated was noxious for human progress.

Tablada exempted himself from the unruly New York masses that he compared to those “degenerates” (villamelones) who went to Mexican bullfights hoping only to witness a goring. Though he had attended the Firpo-Dempsey match, he did so only out of professional “duty” and journalistic curiosity. In order to rescue his bona fides as a discerning intellectual he explained that only hours before the bout he had attended a local “cultural center” where he had conversed with Ruth St. Denis, the “cinemagraphic artist.”⁶⁸⁹ He contrasts this calm intellectual engagement with the tumult he experienced hours later. It was only in venues like *Orientalia* where worthwhile engagement with high culture was possible. His commentary on the

⁶⁸⁶ Tablada, “Dempsey es el hombre más bruto del mundo.”

⁶⁸⁷ This refers to the Great Kantō earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan on September 1, 1923, killing between one hundred and one hundred forty thousand.

⁶⁸⁸ As historian Andrew Kaye has argued in his examination of the political ramifications of African-American boxers in this period, media coverage of boxing in the 1920s was one of the most salient means of representation of African-American celebrities. See: Andrew M. Kaye, *The Pussycat of Prizefighting: Tiger Flowers and the Politics of Black Celebrity* (Athens, Ga: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

⁶⁸⁹ Ruth St. Denis was highly influential American modern dancer and film star whose work Tablada greatly admired.

divergence of American and Latin American culture was more nuanced than most of the voluminous commentary being written and consumed in Mexico City. Tablada was a long time cultural critic and was clearly uncomfortable with the emergence of mass forms of culture and what he saw as the detrimental effects it had within modern urban society. At stake in an act as seemingly insignificant as a boxing match were the philosophical struggles of humans as intellectual beings. As an admirer of American high culture, he positioned himself as a mediator of ideas to choose those aspects of American society that were worthy of emulation and adoption. Despite this forceful rejection of the very basis of this mass cultural spectacle, Tablada simultaneously argued that the bout was fundamentally unjust given Firpo's inexperience and lack of knowledge. Americans like Tex Rickard had taken advantage of the unsuspecting Argentine and Firpo's pitiful showing he likened to "taking candy from a baby," and "robbing a drunk."

José Juan Tablada reacted to the unprecedented amount of international attention dedicated to the match in the days leading up to the September 14th event. Mexican journalists resident in New York and those in Mexico City gleaned even the most seemingly insignificant details of the boxers' preparation for the match. Both boxers held their camps outside of New York and in full view of the public. Daily dispatches from the Associated Press greeted Mexican consumers of transnational information. The fever pitch of journalistic coverage and interest in the event was mirrored in Mexico City by a demonstrable increase in pugilistic events and massive attendance of interracial boxing matches where black and white Americans were pitted against local boxers. Writing for *Excelsior* one journalist commented:

It is undeniable that the fashionable sport is boxing and more undeniable that it is developing each day more and more and that the adepts in Mexico are uncountable. Proof that pugilism has been naturalized among us is that there is not a Saturday and

Sunday in which all the tents in the city and the diverse neighborhood theaters have fights with their preliminaries, their special events and their semifinals.⁶⁹⁰

The international impact of the Dempsey-Firpo bout was mirrored by the increase in pugilistic shows taking place in Mexico City. African American boxers Tiger Flowers, Cyclone Turner, and Battling Norfolk among others fought weekly in *El Toreo* in front of enthusiastic crowds.⁶⁹¹ They were joined by veteran journeymen fighters like “Fireman” Jim Flynn and the Canadian Rough House Burns. These men, the Mexico City press assured its readers, were legitimate “artists” because they had proven themselves in the ring in the United States and because the American press found them to be praiseworthy. Mexican journalist regularly cited the American press to legitimize their claims. Looking to the United States for support and legitimacy in matters concerning modern sport continued a pattern that Mexican boxers like Patricio Martínez Arredondo had initiated by traveling to the north to prove and improve themselves as practitioners of the manly art.

Tablada’s negative opinion of the popular culture prizefighting was disputed by other Mexican cultural critics who touted local engagement with pugilism as proof of Mexican potential for progress. Don Gaspar, the sportswriter for the *El Demócrata*, argued that the “stable” of American boxers brought to Mexico by the Mexican-American impresario Julio Montes had much to teach Mexican youth.⁶⁹² Not only did the nature of the sport suit Mexican temperament, it had already taken root as a wildly popular practice:

⁶⁹⁰ *El Demócrata*, 9 September 1923.

⁶⁹¹ For more on Tiger Flowers, though his time in Mexico receives little attention, see: Kaye, Andrew M. *The Pussycat of Prizefighting: Tiger Flowers and the Politics of Black Celebrity*. Athens, Ga: University of Georgia Press, 2004.

⁶⁹² Julio Montes and his brother the boxer Mercy Montes, along with Mexican impresario Baldomero Romero were widely touted as the “saviours” of boxing in Mexico. Along with Fitten, they were some of the earliest professional promoters who systematically “sold” boxing to the Mexican public. See: Talán, *En el 3er Round*.

.....boxing has preeminence among all sports: at least it is one of the most liked and attended practices [in Mexico City]. And this is natural, our people is made for spectacles and diversions of this nature. Boxing, like bullfighting, will always live in Mexico. Now, we say, beginning next Sunday, boxing will enter into a new epoch, its modern development, in a period of plain progress of *yanqui* pugilism, which is what is practiced in Mexico. And it is just to say, these movements toward advance, or better said this dawn, is due to the pugilists who just arrived and from whom Mexcian boys will learn a lot, [there are] those who are already have clotted [i.e. have experience as fighters] and that are beautiful hopes that sport will gain the prestige that other [Mexican] sports once had, that are now aged and unremarkable (*anodino*).”⁶⁹³

Don Gaspar extended his analysis of the benefits of sport, and boxing especially, to basic problems in urban Mexican society. In imitation of the United States, where Gaspar argued that pugilistic training was a fundamental component of the educational process, Mexicans should learn and disseminate the knowledge of how to defend themselves through mastery of the “beautiful and virile sport.” In an imagined Mexican future, the widespread adoption of the “chivalrous” culture of pugilism would create a less violent and increasingly stable urban society. “Ruffians,” and “louts,” who were a drain on the social body would be elevated by the discipline required to practice such a noble pursuit. Disciplining the bodies of these men would also give them a licit way to make a living and in the process would reduce the use of pistols and knives to settle disputes. The cumulative effect of this cultural shift would depopulate prisons and hospitals, saving government expenditures and giving the lower classes a “way to live honorably.” In Gaspar’s idealized future, Mexico would join in the community of advanced nations to produce “pugilistic seeds.”⁶⁹⁴

Looking for foreign solutions to solve domestic problems, writers like Don Gaspar argued in favor of hybrid cultural and eugenic approaches to modernize the nation. The embrace

⁶⁹³Don Gaspar, *El Demócrata*, 9 September 1923.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

of pugilism as a modern science would lead to an improved, disciplined, and competitive social body that would no longer be a threat to public order. It would make the lower classes useful and self-sufficient while ameliorating those factors, laziness and lack of useful skills, that supposedly made them dangerous. This panacea engaged one of the most salient public debates in this period, as historian Pablo Picatto demonstrates, concerning the real and perceived prevalence of crime in Mexico City.⁶⁹⁵ Picatto argues that Mexican elites imagined a lurid underworld of violent crime that served to undermine the long term civilizing process of both the Porfirian and Revolutionary governments and to characterize the Mexican underclass as hopelessly backwards and biologically predisposed to delinquency. Newspapers and popular broadsheets like those containing illustrations produced by José Guadalupe Posada were the primary means of dissemination for the sensationalized narratives of violence and intrigue in the margins of Mexico City society.⁶⁹⁶ Though these ominous reports occupied highly visible spaces in public discourse, they shared room with self-help pieces that purported to relay positive messages to readers. The appropriation of foreign cultural elements, like those embodied in the self-discipline inherent in modern sport in general and boxing in particular, would serve the patriotic ends of socially concerned Mexicans. The creation of “diminutive Firpos and Dempseys,” would aid Mexico to obtain the qualities of a modern nation.

As Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo has argued, the intellectual foundations of public sphere debates like the one above were embedded in a world view that transcend traditional periodizations of Mexican history into general pre and post Revolutionary watershed. In his examination of the rhetoric of José Vasconcelos, Tenorio shows that many of the ideas credited

⁶⁹⁵ Pablo Picatto, *City of Suspects: Crime in Mexico City, 1900-1931* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

⁶⁹⁶ There is significant analysis of Posada’s work and its role in disseminating cultural messages to semi-literate Mexicans during and before this period. See: Patrick Frank, *Posada's broadsheets: Mexican popular imagery, 1890-1910*. (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 1998); Roberto Berdecio, *Posada's Popular Mexican Prints* (Chemsford, MA: Courier Dover Publications, 1972).

to the “Mexican Ulysses” were little changed from mainstream Porfirian intellectual conceptions of race and nation. Don Gaspar’s creative imagining of a Mexican future mediated and molded by influences imported from abroad mirrored the modernizing project of pre-Revolutionary *científicos* who built railroads, courted foreign investment, and sought to regulate even the traditional clothing and drinking habits of Mexican peasants.⁶⁹⁷ These changes in the form and content of the Mexican nation were, elite Porfirians hoped, to be complemented by cultural shifts and appropriations that brought in line with modern nations like France, England, and the United States. This process of cultural sampling under the Porfiriato had been oriented toward the attainments of high French culture, but by the 1920s the advent of the mass media of cinema and radio had saturated Mexico City with American cultural symbols.⁶⁹⁸

This encouragement of emulation was mirrored in Mexican advertising. Sport as a cultural practice to be imitated and appropriated furnished masculine role models who had, these advertisements showed, successfully countered to enervating effects of modern urban life. The male body was often shown in athletic poses, running races, or boxing to illustrate the preferable forms of vigorous modern masculinity. Shirtless boxers furnished some of the only semi-nude images of the male body for public consumption and admiration. Jack Dempsey, much to the chagrin of José Juan Tablada, spoke directly to Mexican men via advertisements for products that were touted to increase virility and prepare the male body for the daily competition and uncertainties of modern life. In the early 1920s, for example, a product called *Hierro Nuxado*,

⁶⁹⁷ There is a broad scholarly literature on Porfirian modernization. For an overview of several of these diverse attempts to bring Mexico into line with European and American forms and ideas during the Porfiriato see: William H. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2004) and the classic Daniel Cosío Villegas and Moisés González Navarro, *Historia moderna de México. 4, La vida social: el porfiriato (1877-1911)* (México: Hermes, 1970).

⁶⁹⁸ One only has to look at the massive amount of advertising for the dozens of movie theaters in Mexico City during this period to see the preponderance of American film and other forms of entertainment and the relative lack of French or Italian films. Movie theaters were generally less expensive than theater. [Insert Image]

advertised to men all over Latin America, Mexico included, in the form of a sketched rendering of Dempsey in boxing stance and admonishing men to cultivate their virility with the utmost care. The enfeebling culprit that *Hierro Nuxado* identified was iron deficiency: “lack of iron in the blood makes a man a physical and mental nonentity, but it leaches his virile force, mental vivacity, and will power etc, possessions of incalculable importance in all spheres of life.” To show the positive effects of Hierro Nuxado, Dempsey explained how he had taken it before his most difficult bouts, citing the names of his opponents without explaining who they were and in the process drawing on the extant reservoir of Mexican knowledge about the outside world and transnational popular culture.



Figure 12: “Dempsey, The Most Robust Man in the World...” *El Demócrata*, 23 August 1923.

Half-page images of Jack Dempsey and Luis Ángel Firpo stared out at the readers with confident smiles under such headlines as “The Cultivation of Muscle.”⁶⁹⁹ Within civil society, middle and lower class Mexicans emulated these masculine symbols as proof of their cultural attainment. The *Sociedad de Chauffeurs* (Taxi Drivers Society), for example, held public boxing

⁶⁹⁹ *El Demócrata*, 26 August 1923; 23 September 1923.

matches among its members in the rooms above the *Teatro Ideal* in the center of Mexico City. The taxi drivers were touted in the media for their advances in attaining knowledge of the virile sport. Their mastery of these skills, cultural commentators argued, increased their masculinity and proved their cosmopolitan outlook on life and self-improvement.⁷⁰⁰ They held charity matches to benefit earthquake victims a world away in Japan, entertaining the public while raising money for the victims of a natural disaster. They attended boxing matches between globetrotting African-American prizefighters like Battling Duce, Cyclone Turner, Battling Norfolk and young Mexican boxers like Carlos Pavón, Miguel “Mike” Febles, “Jimmie” Drieguez, and the Mazatlan-born son of Scottish immigrants Tommy White.⁷⁰¹ Many of these fighters, African-Americans in particular, found greater possibilities for self-advancement in their professions in Latin America where interracial matches did not stir such public controversy as in the United States.⁷⁰² These and other events created transnational sites where Mexicans and Americans competed and cultivated skills that constituted engagement with cultural novelty and formed transnational rivalries. These events were constantly described in terms of a transfer of knowledge.

This public sphere engagement with modern sport was communicated in terms of positivistic and cosmopolitan world views. Mexican cultural mediators looked not only to the United States, but to other Latin American nations like Cuba and Argentina to find examples of the beneficial role of physical culture for the social body. In Cuba, for example, Representative

⁷⁰⁰ *El Demócrata*, 25 August 1923.

⁷⁰¹ There is scant documentation on the identity of most of these fighters. The “negrito,” who fought under the name “Battling Duce” in Mexico City seems to have worked in the capital for several months. Gustavo Casasola, *Seis siglos de historia gráfica de México, 1325-1900* (México: Ediciones G. Casasola, 1966), p. 2217.

⁷⁰² For a pioneering study on this phenomenon see: Theresa Rundstetler, “‘Journeymen,’ Boxing, Race, and the Transnational World of Jack Johnson,” (PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 2007). Rundstetler is one of a number of recent American Studies Scholars and Historians of the United States who have embraced transnational cultural movements. This study begins to redress the relative lack of examination of the reception and negotiation of transnational cultures in Latin American.

Ramón Zaydin introduced legislation that would funnel state revenue into the construction of sporting facilities and make *matricula deportiva* a mandatory part of the educational process. *El Demócrata* reprinted Zaydin's proposal in full, including its forceful and nationalistic language that placed responsibility for the cultivation of "vigorous youths," in the hands of the state as, he argued, was the case in the United States.⁷⁰³ The use of these transnational lenses to gauge Mexican progress in virilizing the national body increased around events like Firpo-Dempsey.

El Universal recreated the lead up to the bout in New York City. As usual, boxing was associated with a criminal underworld that sought to benefit through the public's willingness to part with hard earned income to witness the spectacle. A police raid had broken up a counterfeiting ring that was in possession of over \$60,000 worth of bogus fight tickets that closely resembled those legitimately printed for the more expensive seats at the Polo Grounds. In Mexico City, one commentator wrote, little else was spoken of in public places and the Mexican allegiance to Luis Ángel Firpo had not been changed even in after the printing of voluminous commentary by American and Mexican connoisseurs that Firpo had little chance of victory against the American champion.⁷⁰⁴

Boxing was juxtaposed with extant forms of entertainment in Mexico that offered a means to understand the theatrical yet utilitarian staging of violence. One anonymous commentator cited the public's ignorance of the customs associated with pugilistic events to account for the problems arising from disorder during matches at *El Toreo*.⁷⁰⁵ The fundamental debate concerned the preferable nature of boxing to bullfighting viewed through the didactic lens of how new knowledge could enhance the individual's ability to function in uncertain modern

⁷⁰³ *El Universal*, 8 September 1923, *El Demócrata*, 2 September 1923.

⁷⁰⁴ *El Universal*, 13 September 1923.

⁷⁰⁵ "La Inaguración de la temporada de box en 'El Toreo'" *El Demócrata*, 10 September 1923.

times. The terms of debate were, once again, Mexican customs, and the writer posed a rhetorical question to his readers: “Can one believe that a people with our traditions is impassioned by and maintains enthusiasm for such a cruel and trivial spectacle?” Those who preferred bullfighting argued that there was less cruelty than in the “beautiful and bloody” art and that boxing was even more “inflaming and savage” than the ancient tradition of man versus bull. Boxing fans, the ostensibly neutral journalist relayed, argued that knowing how to defend oneself against other humans represented practical and therefore superior knowledge: “that there is manly necessity and gallantry in knowing how to give violence and avoid with dexterity the punch that could come from around any corner or from any discussion.”⁷⁰⁶ A modern urban Mexican, these *partidarios* insisted, was a more complete man if he knew how to defend himself against those anonymous attackers that populated the city. These opposing sides found a focal point in the bullring in the days leading up the Dempsey-Firpo bout.

On September 9th, 1923, the boxing season was inaugurated in Mexico City with a “star bout” between two African-Americans, Cyclone Turner and Battling Norfolk, with an undercard of lighter (weight class) Mexicans and Americans.⁷⁰⁷ The journalist covering the event for *El Demócrata* explained the “scandal” caused by angry fans overrunning the ring by citing their impassioned ignorance of the intricacies of prizefighting. In the sixth round of the Turner-Norfolk bout, the crowd threatened to overrun the ring because they thought that they two heavyweights were sand-bagging, not fighting hard enough to give the crowd their money’s

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid. Unfortunately, as with most transnational journeymen fighters in this period, little is known about the background of Battling Norfolk or Cyclone Turner. There are only sketchy details of their lives and individual motivations for leaving the United States. Amateur historians have started to recreate this understudied phenomenon. The foremost representative of this group is Jack Johnson, who fortunately generated an enormous amount of public attention. George Plimpton met and wrote about the aged Battling Norfolk who worked as a rub-down man in a New York’s famous Stillman’s Gym. He remembered him as a “huge scar-faced black fighter,” who was constantly the butt of practical jokes. George Plimpton, *The Best of Plimpton* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1990), p. 35. Cyclone Turner’s real name is unknown, we only know that he was from Gilmer, Texas.

worth. The ringside police had to intervene and convinced the boxers to continue fighting. After a few more moments, the police themselves mounted the ring to take the boxers to jail for defrauding the public. The boxing fans in El Toreo had changed their minds about the efforts of the boxers and prevented the police from arresting them. Turner was unable to continue due to injuries sustained when he tried to pick up the pace and ferocity of the bout to satiate the threatening crowd. After the bout, Turner was taken to the Cruz Verde Hospital where doctors Osorio and Sola pronounced him to be too injured to have continued the bout. The reporter suggested that the public take this “legal faith” endorsed by the Ayuntamiento, that the fight had not been a “fake.”⁷⁰⁸

Local boxing shows, composed of Mexicans and journeymen American fighters competed for public attention with the preparations for the New York bout. Alejandro Aguilar Reyes published biometric data for Firpo and Dempsey, using the greater size of the former to hope and predict that he might have a chance against the American. *El Universal* declared that there had never before been such excitement in Mexico as that generated by the upcoming bout. The betting was in favor of Firpo, even though the *científicos* argued that the Argentine has little chance against the superior knowledge of Dempsey.⁷⁰⁹

Public engagement with the bout was mirrored by diplomatic recognition of Firpo’s embodiment of Hispanic advances in sport. Consular agents and representatives of the “21 Spanish speaking nations,” held a banquet in Firpo’s honor at the *Unión Benéfica Española* in New York. The boxer was presented with a gold medal and a pair of gilded boxing gloves that were purchased with funds collected from the Latin community in New York.⁷¹⁰ John Barrey,

⁷⁰⁸ *El Demócrata*, 13 September 1923, p. 9.

⁷⁰⁹ *El Universal*, 13 September 1923.

⁷¹⁰ *El Demócrata*, 14 September 1923.

the former director of the Pan American Union, called upon the American public to treat Firpo with dignity and fairness in the name of good hemispheric relations. He feared that New Yorkers and the myriad other Americans who had traveled to witness the bout in the Polo Grounds would let their love of Dempsey get the better of their good manners and hospitality for the representative of the “sister” Republic to the south.⁷¹¹

Don Gaspar, writing for *El Demócrata* the day of the bout, distilled what he viewed as the most salient aspirations that Mexicans and other Latin Americans placed on the performance of the Argentine pugilist. The world’s attention was focused on the Polo Grounds for the performance of the “two opposing races.”⁷¹² A South American, as Gaspar explained, went “to the New York stage to demonstrate the potency of the race.”⁷¹³ In perhaps hyperbolic prose, the columnist explain that from the banks of the Rio Bravo to the wilds of Patagonia, Firpo would enter the ring with “the infinite hopes that all Latin Americans have placed on him.” The events in New York both united and helped to define Latin American identity. Firpo respresented Mexico, as he did “all the nations that by ideological communion, by religious identity, and through linguistic equality are the same.” Mexicans, Gaspar argued, lived the moment in solidarity with Argentines and all speakers of the Spanish language as one of their own was “exalted” to throne of athletic excellence. There mere status of Firpo as a challenger had struck a blow to American snobbery in the field of physical culture. The outcome of the bout was immaterial; the fact that Firpo stood first among challengers was indicative of the regeneration of the entire race and the creation of formidable men. The inhabitants of the “Indo-American”

⁷¹¹ Ibid.

⁷¹² Ibid.

⁷¹³ Ibid.

continent were now capable of furnishing “enemies” where once only Europeans and Americans held dominance.

This hyperbolic rhetoric was indicative of a cultural climate in which Latin Americans sought a means of competing with “superior” cultures by engaging them on their own terms. Like Vasconcelos, public sphere intellectuals like Don Gaspar and Aguilar Reyes appropriated the language and symbolism of prizefighting to reject American dominance in what had, by this point, become a universal proving ground for national achievement. Masculine, modern, and transnational, sport was adopted by Mexicans to reject that rhetoric that had, for so long, placed Latin Americans among inferior races. By the end of the decade, as illustrated in the introduction to this chapter, Mexicans seldom debated the status of boxing as symbolic embodiment of Mexican popular culture. Contributing to and perhaps shaping this nationalist appropriation, mass media and popular culture in the form of cinema, pamphlets and popular histories enshrined Mexican boxers as paradigmatic of *Mexicanidad*.

Finding “Heroes” in the Slums: Making Memories of Urban Mexico in the 1930s and 1940s.

The 1930s and 1940s were a particularly prolific era for the production and dissemination of mass culture via the cinema, radio, and the popular press in Mexico. This period has been so often cited as the “Golden Age,” of Mexican mass culture that this designation is now virtually unchallenged.⁷¹⁴ Cultural icons from the marginal neighborhoods of the capital became national

⁷¹⁴ For recent overviews of the characterization of this vibrant era of cultural production and its often conflicting relationship to the Mexican state’s social projects see: Gilbert Joseph, *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001) and Anne Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked*

and international celebrities through mass media coverage and the literary and cinematic dramatization of their paths to fame. This examination of popular culture via the problematic culture of boxing yields a previously understudied vantage point for issues of class antagonism, Mexican-American relations, and changing gender norms in rapidly modernizing Mexico City.

By the 1920s, pugilism had moved from the aristocratic and middle-class social clubs examined in Chapter One. As Stephen Niblo argues in his influential study on Mexico in the 1940s, boxing and wrestling had become “genuinely popular sports.”⁷¹⁵ Spectatorship of boxing was no longer relegated to the elite as it had been during the Porfiriato. In those exclusive spaces, American and French expats along with elite Mexicans watched and reacted to the cultural novelty embodied by the first generation of cross-class Mexican boxers who engaged journeymen black and white Americans and other foreigners in social clubs, theaters, and bullrings. Modern professional sport, and boxing in particular, created rifts within the elite classes between those who eagerly assimilated cultural imports and those who saw in such physicality and popular culture a threat to traditional Mexican values and elite control of social behaviors. By the mid 1920s, boxing had become an emblem of *mexicanidad*. Before Paco

Ladies and Other Threats to the Nation: A Political History of Comic Books in Mexico (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998). Mexican film, in particular, has an extensive historiography that characterizes the 1930s-60s as a fundamental era for the construction of Mexican national culture. See: Emilio Garcia Riera, *Historia del cine mexicano* (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1986) and Sergio de la Mora, *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).

⁷¹⁵ Niblo, like William Beezley’s work on sport during the Porfiriato, addresses a wide array of athletics-as-culture to form ideas about class. Niblo argues that by the 1940s, sport had generated some “authentic heroes.” While this accurate, I will show that based on attendance and mass media coverage of professional boxing starting in the 1920s, the creation of “genuine” sport celebrities engaged in imported sport was a much earlier phenomenon. Niblo’s wide-ranging history, however, is a pioneering work that has raised a number of questions for future research on the important shifts that occurred after the presidential succession of Ávila Camacho in 1940. See: Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington: SR Books, 1999) pp.

Sotelo's death in 1936, Mexican boxing fans, sounding their *gritos de ranchero*, regularly packed spaces like "El Toreo" with over 30,000 *fanáticos*.⁷¹⁶

Boxing was also a point of convergence between Mexican popular and elite cultures. Though boxing shows were one of the most attended public spectacles of the era and the popularly celebrated athletes were predominantly from the working class, elite Mexicans through their business interests and preferences in personal entertainment continued to play a role within the sport.⁷¹⁷ As shown in the introductory vignette, the funeral of the young boxer Paco Sotelo illustrates the cross-class participation and engagement with boxing: a wealthy General ("hero" of the Mexican Revolution) and a doctor from one of the most aristocratic families in Mexico (Bolaños Cacho), joined with the masses in the boxer's funeral march, helping to pay expenses for the elaborate service. This examination of popular culture and mass media traces an important moment in the creation of modern Mexican identity through the popularization of collective Mexican memory of the recent past. In these clear instances of heroic posturing, the consumer of mass culture glimpses social conflict and insecurity as well as the dogged optimism of working-class Mexicans. Many of these documents are didactic manuals on how act like men in the modern Mexican city.

Raúl Talán, the author of *En el 3er Round* and *Y...Fueron Idolos* (And...They Were Idols!) was a transnational proponent of Mexican popular culture. He first gained public attention as a local boxer in Mexico City in the mid-1920s and was one of four representatives of

⁷¹⁶ El Toreo was built as a bullfighting venue but became a popular space for boxing matches in the 1920s and 30s.

⁷¹⁷ As Anne Rubenstein has shown, consumers of popular literature (sports papers being prominent among them), were not limited to the lower classes she cites several studies conducted in mid-century Mexico on the consumers of this media. See: Anne Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation*.

Mexico as an amateur pugilist, along with Alfredo Gaona, in the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics.⁷¹⁸

Though he never enjoyed great success as a boxer, he earned enough money in professional bouts to travel throughout Mexico, the United States, and even as far away as Japan.⁷¹⁹ He boxed professionally until the mid-1930s when he took up acting and appeared in several movies, the most well-known was the suggestively titled *Todo un Hombre* (A Man in Full) by the Cuban-born director of Mexican films, Ramón Peón.⁷²⁰

En el 3er Round, along with Raúl Talán's later book *Y fueron idolos!* is part popular memoir, part plea to collective memory. The firsthand accounts of the culture of boxing and boxers serve several connected purposes. In his first book, Talán travels the breadth of Mexico City to locate individuals whose careers he witnessed from the 1920s to the late 1940s as a boxer and later as a sports journalist for the *revista Mañana*. He portrays the veteran boxers inhabiting the entire range of social classes, from destitute drunks to successful businessmen, and comments extensively on the minutiae of their family lives, their memories and aspirations, and situates them firmly as heroes of popular culture and *mexicanidad*. As Talán describes them, these men fill the role of masculine exemplars, not just the stereotyped Mexican boxers as hyper-

⁷¹⁸ Alfredo Gaona was the brother of the international bullfighting celebrity Rodolfo Gaona. Neither Alfredo or Raúl Talán medaled in this Olympics, but their presence represented Mexico's entrance into the international competition of the modern Olympic games. The first Mexican delegation had attended the 1924 Paris Olympics but with no notable success. See: Máximo Evia Ramírez, *México en la historia de los juegos olímpicos* (México, D.F.: Plaza y Valdés, 2000).

⁷¹⁹ Raúl Talán's international travels and his unofficial representation of Mexico would make an interesting case study in the transnational reach of Mexican civil society in the 1920s and 1930s. One interesting lead has him negotiating a film contract in the Philippines sometime in 1930s. See: Nick Deocampo, *Cine: Spanish Influences on Early Cinema in the Philippines* (Manila: Cinema Values Reorientation Program, National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2003) p. 272.

⁷²⁰ Ramón Peón was a pioneering director of Cuban and Mexican Cinema. He made the last Cuban silent films in the late 1920s and after a stint in Hollywood made several films in Mexico. He was ultimately unable to compete with Hollywood films of the era, who "poached" much of the talent that was increasingly shown on film in terms of Latin popular music. See: Michael Chanan, *Cuban Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 83-87.

aggressive alcoholic womanizers and dandies, but as dedicated fathers and husbands, and inhabitants of the complex urban milieu of modern Mexico City.⁷²¹

Talán's memoirs were produced and consumed within the context of what Armando Bartra has termed "the first tumultuous moments of mass literacy in post-Revolutionary Mexico."⁷²² The increased number of literate Mexicans (and massive population growth in general) in the 1930s and 1940s created conditions for an explosion of accessible reading material in the form of popular novels, comic books, movies and *historietas*. The efforts of post-Revolutionary educational programs of the Mexican government in both rural and urban areas were not limited to reading and writing, but sought to create cultural consumers, who through newspapers, *revistas*, radio, murals, and film were presented with the dramatization of Mexican popular memory.⁷²³

Though Bartra surveys a broad array of these popular cultural products produced by the Mexicans of the 1930s and 40s, he poses sport as an embedded and established facet of Mexican culture. During his overview of these mass productions he identifies Mexican affinity for athletic contests as "the Mexican's proverbial affection for the vicarious enjoyment of sports."⁷²⁴ His explanation is a universalizing attempt to pose sport as "Manichean" entertainment whose valence is tied to the very fact that it is simple and dualistic. He continues:

⁷²¹ The population of Mexico more than doubled between 1940 and 1970. See: Francisco Alba and Joseph E. Potter, "Population and Development in Mexico since 1940: An Interpretation," *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Mar., 1986), pp. 47-75. For a detailed analysis of comic books and Mexican culture from the 1930s-1970s see: Anne Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation: A Political History of Comic Books in Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

⁷²² Armando Bartra, "The Seduction of the Innocents: The First Tumultuous Moments of Mass Literacy in Post-Revolutionary Mexico," in Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent, *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), pp.301-326.

⁷²³ For an account of these efforts in Mexico City under the Cardenas Administration (1934-40) see: Patrice Elizabeth Olsen, *Artifacts of Revolution: Architecture, Society, and Politics in Mexico City, 1920-1940* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), pp. 169-99.

⁷²⁴ Bartra, p. 308.

If literary serials, comics, movies and radio dramas capture their readers, spectators and listeners through conflict and dramatic tension, commercial sports also resort to suspense, except that the drama unfolding before our eyes is not a representation but an actual confrontation. Sporting events, therefore, resemble the narrative genres found in popular culture. And the sports spectacle—collective catharsis and the rite (or cry) of national identity—provides invaluable material for other media.⁷²⁵

It is no stretch to add that sport, manifested both in live performance and mediated further into popular culture through radio, literature, and film constitutes one of the best, yet understudied, vantage points from which to examine the dramatization of Mexican parables that relayed the everyday struggles toward modernity. What is lacking in most accounts that take Mexicans' "proverbial affection," for sport as such, is an explanation of the conditions in which sport became a cultural mainstay.

One possible explanation is the enormous reach of popular novels and *historietas* like the García Valseca media conglomerate, which began as a producer of pocket comic books known as *pepines*, and later expanded into one of the largest publishing interests in the world. Some of their most popular productions were representations of "fields, mats, and rings, populated by countless heroes."⁷²⁶ Sport and the "modern" culture that surrounded it was a popular means through which to show the daily struggle of working class Mexicans confronted with an often hostile environment in which to seek out a better life.⁷²⁷ The use of sport as parable presupposed a familiarity with the language, spaces, rules, and types that such narratives drew upon to entertain and inform.

In one example, the character "Luis," in the comic book series *El Viejo Nido* (The Old Nest), becomes a boxer as a means to make money and court a local girl, Consuelo. He is

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

⁷²⁶ Bartra, "The Seduction of the Innocents," p. 308.

⁷²⁷ Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies and Other Threats to the Nation*. The original comic book can be viewed at the *Hemeroteca Nacional de México*.

constantly surrounded by signifiers of modernity in the boxing ring: bright lights and the wires associated with radio transmissions that contrast with the poverty of his home life in a small village. Luis is the hero of the series; without the advantages of formal education or a wealthy family, he rises through natural talent to obtain middle-class status. He eventually travels to the United States where he wins a championship bout, enabling him to buy back his family home, the “old nest,” which had been foreclosed on by a villainous banker. Luis is able to compete successfully amid the problems of modern life through his traits of determination and skill funneled into professional sport. As Rubenstein argues, “ ‘El Viejo Nido’ was as close to typical as any of the hundreds of serialized narratives published in the daily comic books between 1934 and 1950...it reached out for an audience across age, class and sex.”⁷²⁸ Talán’s memoirs expand on the themes portrayed in this popular series.

Raúl Talán’s popular histories of Mexican boxing are an example of what Bartra deemed “other media.” Though extensively illustrated with stylized pictures of boxers and written in accessible and dramatic prose, they fit uneasily into the genre of comic books and *pepines*. They are hybrid documents directed at a middle and working-class urban audience to inform them of the degraded status of many of the individuals who entertained them in the previous decades when boxing became symbolic of Mexican national identity. Talán places these men and their accomplishments in the realm of popular memory, often starting a description with “as you will all remember..” Such invocations refer to dramatic moments when a Mexican boxer confronts a foreigner in the ring or wins against seemingly insurmountable odds. These are generally triumphant moments when nostalgia for a bygone era serves as a cohesive element for the readers. This appeal to collective memory is repeatedly followed by admonitions and soft

⁷²⁸ Ibid, pp. 50, 52.

recriminations: it is now a national responsibility, Talán implies, to take care of these men whose past exploits provide nostalgia and a point of cohesion for memory.

These appeals to collective identity and social cohesion, as Jesus Martín Barbero argues, occur when popular memory is appropriated and portrayed by mass culture.⁷²⁹ It is an element, to borrow Louis Pérez, Jr.'s phrase, of the slow and continuous process of “becoming” Mexican through the repetition of commonly understood symbols.⁷³⁰ Martín Barbero argues that these types of mass cultural productions are “the development of certain potentialities already within the popular itself.”⁷³¹ They are not impositions, nefarious or otherwise, of a cultural industry detached from consumers.

In his interview with Fidel Ortiz, a boxer who represented Mexico in four Olympic games, Talán explains: “Not only in war have we had heroes, also in other civilian fields and occasions have heroes given great prestige to the *patria*; one of them is Fidel Ortiz who boxed with no other interest than winning cups, medals, and prestige for our country.”⁷³² Boxers are also portrayed as foundational Mexican figures in the transnational drama of dynamic Mexican underclass culture versus the encroachment of the United States. Boxing is a means to express

⁷²⁹ See: Jesús Martín-Barbero, *De los medios a las mediaciones: comunicación, cultura y hegemonía* (Santa Fé de Bogotá: Convenio Andrés Bello, 1998).

⁷³⁰ Louis Pérez Jr. in his pioneering book *On Becoming Cuban* (1999), illustrated through an exhaustive survey of transnational popular culture, imagery, and desire the process through which national identity in Cuba was formed as a bi-product of Cuban affinity for American consumer culture carried via the mass media of film, radio, music, and the press. As in Mexico, this affinity and fascination existed simultaneously with intellectual currents that rejected foreign culture as a nefarious imposition.

⁷³¹ This view on the co-constitutive relationship between popular and mass cultures has been put forth by many scholars of modern Latin America. The idea is a critique of Adorno and Horkheimer's characterization of “cultural industries” as pernicious influences on the masses that stifle creativity, individuality and destroy traditional culture. See: Martín Barbero, *De los medios a las mediaciones: comunicación, cultura y hegemonía*; and Gilbert Michael Joseph and Daniel Nugent, *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

⁷³² Talán, *En el 3er Round*, p. 135. Fidel Ortiz, after his retirement from the amateur ring, continued on the Mexican national team as a boxing coach. He attended the games in: Amsterdam (1928), Los Ángeles (1932), Berlin (1936), and London (1948).

virility and skill appropriated by Mexican men in competition with other Mexicans and especially with representative of other countries.

Throughout the book, Talán encourages readers to support the several veteran athletes through direct handouts or by patronizing their small businesses (of which he publishes their street addresses). These mostly lower class men were the protagonists in what Talán often calls “the Golden Age of Mexican Boxing,” and it pains him to see what has become of most of them. Talán’s interviewees who have achieved middle-class status, conversely, are defined by what they are able to consume, not by the morbid details of their decline. In the late 1930s and throughout the 1940s, Mexicans experienced a rapid increase in consumer culture that paralleled the growth of Mexico City and the advent of modern industrial capitalism.⁷³³ The author’s travels in the capital create a map of class in 1940s Mexico City. As he visits the several men and women in their homes, the reader is given a critical description of each neighborhood in addition to the condition of the homes, the quality (in terms of “modern” or “American”) of the furnishings, and the degrees of filial piety in evidence. Talán lauds both the respect given to these men by their children and the sacrifices the prizefighters made to support their own elderly parents.

En el 3er Round also engages Mexican critiques of American culture and racial prejudice as the readers accompany these popular heroes on reluctant journeys into the United States, as travel and success in *el norte* become both a badge of honor and an affirmation of traditional Mexican values among Talán’s informants. This confrontation with foreigners in general, but American culture in particular, will form a substantial part of the examination of boxers in film

⁷³³ See: Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don't Go Home!: Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 207-229.

later in this chapter. For now, Talán's first-hand account of events and the words of his informants create a popular interpretation of Mexico City, boxing, and Mexican identity.

Patricio Martínez Arredondo was the “first boxing idol of Mexico,” and began his boxing career in 1911 at the end of the Porfiriato. When he was interviewed in the late 1940s he ran a one-man watch repair shop on Calle Honduras, north of the zócalo. His father had been a watch repairman and Martínez Arredondo had started in that business before he took up prizefighting. Hearing of money to be made in volunteering to fight in preliminary bouts, he joined a group of “bootblacks and paper boys,” who congregated outside of the aristocratic *Academia Metropolitana* whenever a bout was announced, hoping to be chosen by the Academia's impresario. After his first few bouts he came under the tutelage of the Mexican “boxing professor,” Salvador Esperón, who taught pugilism and physical culture to the Mexican upper class.⁷³⁴

Martínez Arredondo emerges as a lower class Mexican fighter of natural ability which when paired with the training he received from the “boxing professor,” earned him enough money in the ring, “up to 1,000 pesos per fight,” to temporarily enjoy the lifestyle of upper class men. In addition to his prowess in the ring (he “never backed down to anyone,”) he proved his virility by citing escapades with expensive prostitutes. In those days, he recalls, there was no lack of women in his life, especially those who would take him for rides in the “carretelas de bandera azul.” These carriages, which disappeared with the advent of automobiles in Mexico

⁷³⁴ Salvador Esperón, along with Fernando Colín and Kid Lavín were the first generation of Mexican fighters who learned their trade from the journeymen American and Jamaican (Jim Smith) boxers who fought in exhibition matches in the early twentieth century when boxing was purely and exotic import and curiosity among elite Porfirians. See Chapter 1 of this dissertation. Esperón was born to an aristocratic family from Oaxaca City and he began boxing as a student at the Colegio Militar in Mexico City in 1904. Recalling this era, Esperon states that boxing was a preserve of the elite, but that after the Porfiriato, “the Revolution came and they passed out gloves to everyone.” While officially illegal under the Díaz government, most fights Esperon engaged in took place in secret, “in barns” (picaderos de caballos), away from the police, or with the stipulation that boxing exhibitions took place in front of members' only clubs. See also Esperón's manual on boxing and memoirs:

City, were remembered by the Mexican poet Lopez Velarde as being occupied by “cortesanans” (luxury prostitutes) and charged the high rate of 1.50 pesos per hour.⁷³⁵ He recalls one prostitute from Merida who promised to marry him and then made off with another man.

His career took him to distant Mexican states like Yucatán where his Chinese corner man taught him the “American” trick of bandaging his hands with hard tape in order to defeat a “glingo” [sic] opponent who had triumphed over him on two previous occasions through that method of cheating.⁷³⁶ He sarcastically recalls that he knocked an opponent, Mike Febles, out of the ring but that Jack Dempsey, the American heavyweight champion the 1920s, got all the credit for that move because Martínez Arredondo was only a “little champion of Mexico.”

Martínez Arredondo was a seminal figure in the popularization of prizefighting in Mexico. He was one of the first boxers of the working class who successfully challenge foreign boxers in Mexico like the Afro-Dutch Jim Smith, who had made a successful living by defeating all Mexican comers and training locals.⁷³⁷ A 1919 article on Arredondo appeared in *El Heraldo de Mexico*. It pictured a muscular athlete in boxing stance. The young boxer, writes the reporter, challenged the *negro* Jim Smith, who despite being a foreigner, was then Champion of Mexico.⁷³⁸ Mexicans should be proud of him, the writer implies, because he is an “able,

⁷³⁵Ramón López Velarde and José Luis Martínez, *Obra poética* (Colección Archivos, 36. Madrid [u.a.]: Allca XX, Ediciones Unesco, 1998), p. 252.

⁷³⁶ As the character “Luis” in the *pepín* series *El Viejo Nido*, Martínez Arredondo was a working class Mexican who through his boxing career was able to travel the country, knowing distant regions of Mexico and the United States that he would have been unlikely to experience given his class status.

⁷³⁷ There is fragmentary documentation on the identity of Jim Smith, who arrived in Mexico City sometime toward the end of the Porfiriato. He was variously cited as American, Jamaican, and Australian. He was an enormously prolific prizefighter and traveled virtually all of Mexico, fighting from Oaxaca to Ciudad Juarez. His rivalry with Martínez Arredondo provided constant fodder for newspaper columns toward the end of the military phase of the Mexican Revolution.

⁷³⁸ In 1928, after a series of foreigners held the title of “Mexican champion” throughout the years of the Revolution and the 1920s, the Boxing Commission decreed that to hold such a distinction a fighter would have to be Mexican-born.

studious, and dedicated” boxer.⁷³⁹ In 1919, journalists still referred to boxing as the “saxon sport,” which Mexicans were slowly starting to master. Evidence of this was the previous match between Arredondo and Smith, in which the Mexican (“our countryman”) demonstrated his “bravery and knowledge,” by taking the offensive during twenty rounds of boxing. The writer extols the skill, talent, and ability of the Mexican boxer that is evident precisely because he is the first to be able to go the distance with the foreigner and not be completely destroyed by the effort.⁷⁴⁰

One Mexican social commentator identified the young boxer as a standard bearer for Mexican youth. Despite his general disgust with professional boxing as little more than glorified street fighting, the critic Rodolfo Álvarez dedicated an article in the weekly magazine *Arte y Sport* to the championship bout between Mike Febles and Martínez Arredondo.⁷⁴¹ He writes of the crowd in attendance in fearful terms; the “profane ones,” a euphemism for the boisterous fight fans, threaten disorder and must have the rules of the match explained to them by the referee lest they disrupt the proceedings.⁷⁴² Despite this unease with his surroundings, Alvarez praises the Mexican fighter as “valiant and herculean,” and a “true marvel.” When Arredondo wins the bout, Alvarez wishes him luck in his travels to the United States where he will “improve and perfect” his skills as a boxer. This journey to the United States as prerequisite to mastering the imported art would become a leitmotiv for Mexican boxers in the years to come.

⁷³⁹ *El Heraldo de Mexico*, 10 September 1919.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.* The timekeeper, an honorary and functional position usually given to guests of honor, was Jack Johnson, the African-American heavyweight who was in Mexico at the time. The presence in of foreign celebrity prizefighters like Johnson and the “hobo” heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey were highly publicized events. Dempsey, in particular, was the subject of daily press coverage and his tour of a cigarette factory in Mexico City, was used to advertise Mexican products. There are several pictures of his trip to Mexico housed in the photographic collection of the *Archivo Casasola* in the *Archivo General de la Nación*.

⁷⁴¹ This magazine was an elite attempt to fuse high culture (in the form of theater and art critiques, publishing poetry, and commenting on European literature) with the emergent phenomenon of “Sport.” The writers, uneasy in their task of covering what was becoming popular culture, show a marked ambivalence to sport beyond the salon. *Arte y Sport*, 28 February 1920.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*

By 1919, spaces like the *Club Ugartechea* were insufficient to contain the unruly masses who wanted to attend boxing matches.⁷⁴³ One reporter for *Excelsior* recounted the scene at the gym during an Arredondo versus Jim “Black Diamond” Smith as “full of lovers of the virile and daring sport.” The reporter admonished the impresarios of the bout for not separating seats for the press: he had to stand on top of a chair in the back of the gym and still was unable to get a decent view of the match.⁷⁴⁴

The following year on March 12, a grudge rematch between the young Mexican and *negro* Jim Smith caused “scandal” and near bloodbath outside of the ring.⁷⁴⁵ Toward the end of the match, held at the *Frónton Nacional* on Iturbide Street near the Alameda (the elite promenade), Arredondo was disqualified by the referee for repeated low-blows.⁷⁴⁶ Though the observer argued that the Mexican was leading in the match, the Queensbury Rules stipulated that the victory go to Jim Smith.⁷⁴⁷ Upon this decision, Arredondo immediately assaulted the referee, who happened to be the veteran boxer Fernando Colín. When Colín fought back, the police guard at ringside immediately sprang into action on the command of the police chief, who was a spectator at the match.⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴³ Enrique Ugartechea, though little information on his survives, should be seen as one of the first Mexicans to introduce modern physical culture to the Mexican elite in the early twentieth century. He was a body builder and wrestler who made a living through his “Centro de Cultura Física Ugartechea,” the first of its kind in Mexico. He began his career by trying to incorporate the methods of the famous German body builder Eugene Sandow. See Chapter 1.

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁵ *Excelsior*, 13 March 1920.

⁷⁴⁶ A *Frontón* is a space dedicated to the Basque-derived sport jai-alai. Along with bullrings, these were symbolic spaces that recalled Hispanic culture legacies that were often used to stage modern boxing matches in both Mexico and Cuba.

⁷⁴⁷ The Queensbury Rules, codified in 1867 in London, replaced the London Prize Ring Rules that had guided boxing matches since 1743. Their adoption in Mexico was important to elite observers like the journalist for *Excelsior*, who hoped that by narrowing the possibilities for disagreements over boxing matches, disorder could be avoided.

⁷⁴⁸ *Excelsior*, 13 March 1920.

Arredondo called the crowd to come to his defense and prevent his arrest. The spectators threw chairs into the ring and threatened the police. Thankfully, the reporter wrote, the spectators had been forced to give up their weapons before entering the *Frontón* and a possible “tragedy” was averted. Despite these security precautions, however, several pistols were still revoked from members of the crowd who were in the process of mounting the ring to free Arredondo. The writer for *Excelsior* used the opportunity to comment on the shamefulness of boxing in general and to imply that it did not suit “Latin,” temperament. He called the readers’ attention to same situation that had occurred recently in Spain. How could so many propose that a brutal sport like boxing, with its inherent disorder, replace the national pastime of bullfighting? That the match took place in an arena dedicated to the practice of a Hispanic derived sport heightened the incongruity of the match.

A week later, Arredondo sent a letter of apology to the editor of *Excelsior*.⁷⁴⁹ In it he agrees with the above assessment; he blamed his actions in hitting the referee on his “Latin temperament,” that had “blinded him with courage.” He begs forgiveness from the public, the authorities, and above all the referee, against whom he claims no rancor. He adds that he is shortly to leave for the United States, where he will perfect his boxing skills and will “put on high the banner (pabellón) of [his] dear *patria*.”⁷⁵⁰ On his return, he hopes to make up for his transgression by showing “the advances obtained” from the north.⁷⁵¹

The media record of Martínez Arredondo’s career complemented by the testimony recorded by the chronicler Raúl Talán portray the boxer as an ambiguous symbol of Mexican national pride. He was a transitional figure between elite acceptance and engagement of sport

⁷⁴⁹ *Excelsior*, 22 March 1920.

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*

and the popularization of prizefighting.⁷⁵² He fought and trained in locales like the *Club Ugartechea*, a gymnasium founded in the early twentieth century to build the muscles of the capital's gentry. He also fought in theaters and jai-alai courts, before the massive constructions of the late 1920s and early 30s capitalized on the Mexican fascination with combat sport.⁷⁵³ He was born into a lower middle class family and competed for employment with bootblacks and paperboys before earning temporary wealth and elite status only to return to the profession of his father. He traveled Revolutionary Mexico in the company of Jim Smith, the Afro-Jamaican journeyman fighter with whom he maintained a rivalry for over forty years.⁷⁵⁴ Newspaper readers in Mexico encountered news of his travels and triumphs alongside explanations of Pancho Villa's latest campaigns; as Talán alluded to above, Mexican civil society was slowly introduced to a new kind of "idol."⁷⁵⁵

Miguel "Mike" Febles was a contemporary and opponent of Martínez Arredondo. He was a circus performer turned prizefighter who fought under the pseudonym "The Veracruz Lion." Before taking up boxing, Febles was a naval cadet in Veracruz and stationed in Mexico City at the beginning of the twentieth century, he began work in the entertainment industry, performing and drawing crowds with such feats as hanging by his teeth from a wire between the city's two tallest buildings. He was an actor/performer for the famous Orrin Circus, which was

⁷⁵² As Allen Guttman and Alan Klein have shown, modern sport culture in general first entered Latin American societies through the transnational contacts and travels of elite society and through the presence of foreign residents, especially British and Americans. Guttman argues, citing Klein, that modern sport "was first the province of the elite and then taken over by other sectors of society only underscores the fact that culture is competed for." Allen Guttman, *Games and Empires: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1994), p. 70, and Alan M. Klein "Sport and Colonialism in Latin America and the Caribbean." *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, 10 (1991): 257-271.

⁷⁵³ Jai alai, a sport of Basque origins, was popular among Mexico's upper classes in the beginning of the twentieth century. It is still practiced in elite circles in Mexico. On the career of Enrique Ugartechea, see Chapter 1.

⁷⁵⁴ Looking back on this rivalry, Arredondo claimed that Smith had once bit him in the forehead during a fight. Despite their supposed dislike for each other, they engaged in several bouts, including taking part in carnival festivities. See: Talán, En el 3er Round.

⁷⁵⁵ *Excelsior*, 26 September 1917;

known for its sometimes risqué shows and was a highly visible cultural phenomenon in late-Porfirian Mexico.⁷⁵⁶

Febles, like Arredondo, led a peripatetic career that took him all over Mexico, the Caribbean, and the United States.⁷⁵⁷ In a given week, his promoters might have him box in Puebla, Pachuca, Guadalajara and Mexico City. In his interview with Talán, he claims to have been a captain in Obregón's cavalry during the Revolution and to later have been a boxing instructor for government officials in the National Palace. Also like Arredondo, he is portrayed by Talán as a forgotten and forlorn character who in his later years made a meager salary as a masseuse and "professor of physical education."⁷⁵⁸ Like so many of the "forgotten idols," encountered by Talán, Febles is portrayed as a foundational figure in a hybrid Mexican culture, representative of an era when modern professional sport was enacted as a novel attraction and foreign import that was of uncertain appeal to Mexican culture. He was a transnational proponent of modern sport and with his anglicized first name and wide travel is an example of

⁷⁵⁶The circus in Porfirian Mexico was an employer of entertainers and athletes. For an overview of the Circo Orrín as an important site in the cultural life of Mexico City, see: Julio Revollo Cárdenas, *La fabulosa historia del circo en México* (México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2004) pp. 160-65. Revollo Cárdenas recounts that President Díaz himself attended the functions of the Circo Orrin. See also: Felicia Hardison Londré and Daniel J. Watermeier. *The History of North American Theater: The United States, Canada, and Mexico : from Pre-Columbian Times to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1998); George Leonard Chindahl, *A History of the Circus in America* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1959). For a firsthand account of the Circo Orrin see: Manuel Gutierrez Najera, *Divagaciones Y Fantasías* (Mexico: Sep Setentas, 1974). Among its more famous actors was the clown Ricardo Bell. The Circus's building was demolished in 1910. This circus, which also had a traveling troupe, figures prominently in many memoirs.

⁷⁵⁷ Febles also figures in to the early history of boxing in Cuba and there is some debate as to whether he was born in Cuba or Mexico. It is likely that he was born in Veracruz, as he himself stated in his interview with Raúl Talán. His origins may have been kept purposely vague and contingent on the necessity to stir controversy when advertising a boxing match. The Mexico City press was often contradictory, sometimes citing him as "South American," and sometimes as "Mexican," and often as simply "Southeastern." In 1913, he lived in Havana where he held boxing matches in his home. See: Enrique G. Encinosa, *Azúcar y Chocolate: historia del boxeo cubano* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 2004); and Jorge Alonso, *Puños dorados: apuntes para la historia del boxeo en Cuba* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 1988). p. 21.

⁷⁵⁸ Talán, *En el 3er Round*, pp. 26-28.

the transnational world inhabited by entertainers and athletes in early twentieth century Latin America.⁷⁵⁹

As archetypal figures in Talán's pantheon of early Mexican athletes, Febles and Arredondo, who both live in impoverished conditions in the narrative, call out for more elevated positions in Mexican popular memory.⁷⁶⁰ Febles is mocked even by taxi drivers, and when Talán finds him the writer is taken by "a great sadness in finding another fallen idol." He continues: "Febles, the long ago glorious pugilist whom even the chorus girls fought over and had a harmonious and athletic body is now a washed-up man (un hombre acabado), with clothes not exactly fresh from the laundry..."⁷⁶¹ Febles, who had boxed in front of sold-out crowds into the 1920s to prove against foreign pugilists like the Italian American Jimmie Dundee that "in Mexico there [were] good fighting cocks (en México hay buenos gallos), now a precarious life in a marginal neighborhood of the capital."⁷⁶² Despite Febles' poverty, he emerges as a "cultured" and adventurous man who, famous in his time, was an "idol" before mass spectatorship created the enormous wealth and celebrity of athletes in the era when Talán wrote his account. They are embedded in a transitional period in modern Mexican history when formerly exclusive sites of elite, cosmopolitan culture were subsumed into sites for the enactment of popular culture.

⁷⁵⁹ Another such figure who would make an interesting case study is Juan "John" Budinich, a Chilean boxer who learned to box while a student at Columbia University in New York. By 1910, Budinich had established himself as a boxing instructor in Havana. He later returned to his native Valparaiso, Chile, where he is credited with being among the first to introduce the "Anglo" sport. In a letter to the Peruvian magazine *Variedades*, Budinich praises the "modern" sport of boxing and presents himself as a traveling proponent of physical culture. See *Variedades*, 5 September 1908.

⁷⁶⁰ Febles, according to Talán, lived in an impoverished neighborhood of Tacuba with a "humble" seventy year old woman. Even the taxi driver has a hard time finding a house and has to ask a couple of local drunks for assistance.

⁷⁶¹ Talán, *En el 3er Round*, p. 24.

⁷⁶² *Excelsior* 10 October 1922. Jimmie Dundee took up residence in Mexico City, married a Mexican woman and later became a naturalized citizen.

Fight Films: The Dramatization of Mexicanness Through Boxing in Golden Age

Cinema

“...the vast increase in channels of communication which flow across cultural boundaries has the effect of dismantling old forms of marginalization and domination and making new forms of democratization and cultural multiplicity possible.”⁷⁶³

Of the several boxing films made in Mexico during the “Golden Age,” one in particular enjoyed wide distribution and elicited salient commentary. It illustrates the centrality of boxing in popular representations of urban *Mexicanidad* that followed the period in which the sport was popularized in the 1920s and 1930s. Alejandro Galindo’s, *Campeón Sin Corona* (1946) [Champion Without a Crown] starring the matinee idol David Silva is a thinly veiled biopic treatment of the life of the most popular Mexican boxer of the 1930s, Rodolfo Casanova.⁷⁶⁴ Silva’s character is the poor ice cream salesman who becomes the champion boxer, *Kid Terranova*. *Campeón Sin Corona* debuted in 1945 to rave reviews that cited the film as a nationalist triumph of artistic movie making that was the *cañonazo del año* (Cannonade of the Year) and continued to be shown in theaters all over the country for over a year.⁷⁶⁵ The role of Kid Terranova had enthroned David Silva as the Mexican cinematic symbol of “virility.”⁷⁶⁶ The magazine *El Redondel*, citing the several reviews and “elogies” to the film, counseled its readers:

“you will see this Mexican film and intensely live this simple and human story, taken from the lives of men of the barrios of Mexico, of those beings who, tired of fighting

⁷⁶³ William Rowe and Vivian Schelling, *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 1.

⁷⁶⁴ Alejandro Galindo (dir.), *Campeón Sin Corona* (Excaliber Media Group, 1946). Galindo was the most outspoken Mexican director in this period. He was the first to use, in *Campeón Sin Corona*, what Carl Mora describes as authentic street dialogue from the slums of Mexico City. Similarly to the films of his contemporary Elia Kazan, Galindo’s work used Marxian critiques to represent the struggles of working class Mexicans in the face of immobile socio-economic difficulties. The Mexican relationship with the United States also figures prominently in Galindo’s critique of transnational capitalism, as in his overtly political films *Wetbacks* (1952), in which his explicit purpose was “to convince Mexicans not to go to the United States. Mora, *Mexican Cinema*, p. 88.

⁷⁶⁵ Rafael Aviña, *David Silva: un campeón de mil rostros* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2007), p. 71.; *El Informador* (Guadalajara), 27 August 1946; 28 April 1947; 13 February 1949.

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibid.* The most famous actor of the period, Pedro Infante, would also play the role of Mexican boxer, in *Pepe el Toro* (1953).

against adversity, give themselves up to vice and misery....Alejandro Galindo knows how to impress [into the film] all the soul of the barrios of Mexico.⁷⁶⁷

Other reviews further developed this evaluation, citing the picture as “the most Mexican film..the most Mexican labor” and calling on Mexicans to “celebrate Mexican Independence Day (las fiestas pátrias) by seeing the most Mexican of films.”⁷⁶⁸ One reviewer in Guadalajara viewed the character of Kid Terranova as a mirror of a well known type: “the Mexican athlete, invincible sometimes, enervated and decadent others, victim of female wiles, like all heroes who come from the dirt (*barro*).”⁷⁶⁹ The story was also an accurate slice of life from Mexico City. For his role in the film, Silva won the *Ariel* award for the best male lead in Latin American cinema. Although this fairly complex and symbolic story that warrants extended treatment, a brief overview of the plot gives insights into how boxing was presented as a double-edged sword for poor, urban Mexicans.

Kid Terranova, in the beginning of the film, is a laborer in an ice cream parlor on a busy street in Mexico City. He has boxed a few times for small purses in rowdy venues where the crowd is drunken and vicious. One day on the street, while standing up for a defenseless individual, Terranova is discovered by a local Mexican boxing promoter. Over the course of the next several months, Terranova rises through the ranks in several bouts. His long-suffering mother worries over the violence of the ring and the boxer’s newfound wealth that has begun to change his personality. He has now donned the zoot suit, a symbol of raffish Mexican identity that has received its due amount of historiographical treatment.⁷⁷⁰ As the melodrama unfolds, the boxer turns his back on his previous life. His first love interest, who has long dark braids and

⁷⁶⁷ *El Redondel*, 16 June 1946.

⁷⁶⁸ Aviña, *David Silva*, p. 73.

⁷⁶⁹ “Cinematograficas,” *El Informador*, 3 September 1946.

⁷⁷⁰ Catherine Sue Ramírez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Eduardo Obregón Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime Los Angeles* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003);

works in a local *taquería*, is replaced by a wealthy Mexican blond who uses the boxer sexually and as a symbol of her elite pastime of slumming. She speaks English with her friends and uses language to embarrass the boxer while getting him hooked on alcohol. Meanwhile, the working-class girl in the *taquería* turns her back on Terranova due to his newfound arrogance and flashy displays of wealth.

Language continues to figure prominently in the film as a signifier of class and a point of shame for Terranova who is literally rendered motionless by fear when a Chicano boxer, Joe Ronda (a thinly veiled reference to the Scottish-Mexican Joe Conde) speaks English to him in the ring.⁷⁷¹ The hero is confused and terrified, unable to react. Another scene in the offices of the Boxing Commission finds the boxer angered when English is spoken in front of him and refuses to smoke “American” cigarettes like the Joe Ronda and his elite entourage. Though Terranova is eager to be accepted by the wealthy set, his inability to speak English, his “inferiority complex” and his sentimental ideas of romance make him the “mascota” (pet), of the promiscuous blond.⁷⁷² As the boxer begins to self-destruct he is ultimately rescued by his renewed esteem for his working class identity. He returns to the fold, leaving the wealthy blond, returning to his previous working-class wardrobe and realizing that the dignity of his class and the importance of his family are his sources of stability and identity. The only way that Terranova is able to make sense of the dizzying urban world around him is in a return to *Mexicanidad*. While boxing is an established fact of national life, it represents in Galindo’s

⁷⁷¹ Maldonado, *Pasión por los guantes*; Talán, *En el 3er round*. Conde was born in Mazatlán to Scottish parents and was successful but unpopular boxer in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

⁷⁷² The film historian Carlos Mora has identified the “inferiority complex” of the Mexican male as one of the most salient ideas in Galindo’s films. Carl J. Mora, *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 71.

films what film historian Ernesto Acevedo Muñoz has called a “modernization dilemma” in that it represents both local Mexican culture and the decadent influences of urban life.⁷⁷³

The choice of boxing as the medium to express working class Mexican identity and the transnational challenges to tradition in this era was an apt one. The movie, based on the life of the well-known boxer Rodolfo Casanova, drew on personalities and ideas that were hailed as exemplar of Mexican life in the period. The characters and situations were accessible to popular audiences. Boxing had moved, in the period of a few decades, from elite spaces and exotic foreign culture into a trope for the Mexican engagement with modernity.⁷⁷⁴ As Charles Ramírez Berg has demonstrated, the Mexican genre of boxing films poses the question “of whether a poor urban youth can rise above poverty and hold on to his birthright of *mexicanidad*.”⁷⁷⁵ Boxing, in this genre of popular culture, is the urban Mexican symbol of national identity.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the Mexican appropriation of boxing after the Revolution became a means to express working class identity, masculinity, and the Mexicanization of a transnational cultural medium. As I argued in Chapter One, boxing entered Mexican society as a means to imitate the eugenic trends surrounding physical culture as a way to raise the “cultural level” of elite Mexicans. Following the Revolution, this process continued and was taken up by poor, urban Mexicans who used boxing as a means to upward mobility, a way to leave the barrio. By 1930, boxing moved into the cultural space once occupied by bullfighting and was expressed as a threat to Mexican traditions. Though both boxing and

⁷⁷³ Ernest Acevedo-Muñoz, *Buñuel and Mexico: The Crisis of National Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 169.

⁷⁷⁴ Other films that drew on boxing as an established medium of expressing working class *mexicanidad* are: *El Gran Campeón* (1949); *Kid Tabaco* (1954); *Pepe el Toro* (1953) *Guantes de Oro* (1961); *Barrio de Campeones* (1977); *Ángel del Barrio* (1980); *Nocaut* (1984);

⁷⁷⁵ Charles Ramírez Berg, *Cinema of Solitude: A Critical Study of Mexican Film, 1967-1983* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), p. 169.

bullfighting continued to exert influence on Mexican culture, I argue that the culture of boxing more accurately mirrors the hybrid, transnational culture of urban Mexican identity. In the final section, I offer a few observations of that culture, alive and well in Mexico City, and paradoxically, bringing boxing back to the United States.

CHAPTER V

“MARCHING AT THE HEAD OF CIVILIZATION: CUBAN BODIES, TRANSNATIONAL LENSES, THE PUBLIC SPHERE”

When the nineteen year-old Afro-Cuban, Eligio “Kid Chocolate” Sardiñas, arrived on a hydroplane in the Havana harbor from New York in September of 1929 he was treated to a hero’s welcome. Members of the city government and thousands of *habaneros* thronged the docks and the sea front drive (*malecón*) to escort him to the temporary City Hall, where he was awarded a medal as a national treasure.⁷⁷⁶ He had defeated the Jewish-American Al Singer in front of 45,000 boxing fans at the Polo Grounds in New York and in the process was hailed by the Cuban (and American) press as a shining example of national accomplishment abroad in a highly symbolic medium that for centuries had been dominated by Americans and Europeans, but which by the mid-1920s had become a highly visible feature of urban and Afro-Cuban culture.⁷⁷⁷ Though this was not the first public sphere celebration of foreign and national athletes as paragons of “racial” excellence (be they of the “Latin,” Afro-Cuban, Mexican, or Argentine “races”), but the enormous amount of international press coverage and the popularity resulting from Kid Chocolate’s dominance in the “modern” competitive world of sport made him the most celebrated Afro-Cuban since War of Independence General Antonio Maceo.⁷⁷⁸ The image of

⁷⁷⁶ “Homenaje a Kid Chocolate” (Homage to Kid Chocolate), *El Diario de la Marina*, 1 September 1929.

⁷⁷⁷ The bout was one of the most important social events of the year in New York. Singer, the local favorite, lost to Chocolate by decision in front of such notables as Fiorello La Guardia and the Cuban writer and cartoonist José “Joe” Massaguer. *New York Times*, 30 August 1929. Singer would have to wait for a rematch, as the Afro-Cuban and his manager left for a two months vacation in Cuba. John Kieran editorialized that “Chocolate” was one of the most sensational fighters seen to date, and that his skill in the ring was quickly changing the game in favor of the lighter weight classes away from the historically dominant heavyweight division. John Kieran “Sports of the Times,” *New York Times*, 24 October 1929.

⁷⁷⁸ See: Alejandra Bronfman, *Measures of Equality: Social Science, Citizenship, and Race in Cuba, 1902-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) and David C. LaFevor, *Atavism, Watermelons, and the Bronze Titan: Attitudes Towards Race in the Early Cuban Republic*, (Thesis (M.A. in History)--Vanderbilt

Maceo, the “Bronze Titan,” had been widely espoused in Republican Cuba as a symbol of Afro-Cuban participation in the thirty year struggle for Cuban Independence from Spain (1868-98). His image had undergone a “whitening process,” through which Cuban scientists and politicians claimed that his heroics (and martyrdom) on the battlefield were due to the salience of his African heritage evident in his superior physique and durability and his white (“Parisian”) cranial capacity. Put simply, his physicality was African, his brain was European. His valorization in the pantheon of Cuban heroes was, therefore, explicitly tied to the favorable mix of genetics, a mix in which the Cuban elite located the possibility of national and racial progress. Kid Chocolate was explicitly and favorably compared to that lionized symbol of Afro-Cuban bravery and selfless *cubanidad*.⁷⁷⁹ His success was also linked in the public sphere to the brain-power of his white manager.

Despite attempts by legislators and influential sectors of civil society like the National Association of Veterans of the Wars for Independence to prevent the implantation of the “yankee passion,” Cubans had appropriated the transnational practice that for many defined modern cosmopolitan masculinity.⁷⁸⁰ Not only was news of the triumph of “El Kid,” daily fodder for the Cuban press, he was mythologized by poets and playwrights, posed for nude photographs by *avant garde* artists in Havana and sculptors in the United States, and was featured in dozens of advertisements for products ranging from upscale men’s clothing to alcoholic beverages. He received “hundreds of letters daily from adoring fans.”⁷⁸¹ His life was dramatized in artistic,

University, May 2006); and Philip Sheldon Foner, *Antonio Maceo: The "Bronze Titan" of Cuba's Struggle for Independence* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977).

⁷⁷⁹ “Ideales de una Raza,” *Diario de la Marina*, 1929.

⁷⁸⁰ Letter from Association of Veterans to President Mario Menocal, *ANC*, Secretaría de la Presidencia: Caja 19, Numero 8.

⁷⁸¹ For example, the blackface actor and playwright Juan Alberto O’Farrill, became a primary conduit for expressing Afro-Cuban culture in the United States through his plays that appeared in Harlem. In the late 1920s, he penned a play titled “Kid Chocolate,” which was performed internationally, one such performance debuted at the famous Apollo Theater of New York: Nicolás Kanellos, *Hispanic Literature of the United States: A Comprehensive*

intellectual, and popular mediums. The rise of Chocolate is only the most visible part of the process that began with Cubans looking outward to define their competitive national identity.⁷⁸²

Surveying the city of Havana in the early 1930s, the physician and writer Mariano Aramburu lauded the visible changes in the very bodies of his fellow citizens that the mania for “physical culture” had shaped over the preceding years:

Today one no longer sees in Havana that lamentable specimen of weak flaccid homunculus, standing ridiculously small, nervous, and gesticulating, that the Spanish left us...like the silly bird in our backlands. The *habanero* has gained much in size, in amplitude of chest, in biceps and in muscular fortitude.⁷⁸³

Cubans were no longer the backward and effeminate men that their Spanish heritage had supposedly molded them into. They had transformed their bodies into modern and masculine forms, even to the point that the writer was alarmed at the importance placed on developing robust physiques at the expense of a cultured intellect.⁷⁸⁴ In the space of a generation, Cubans had trained themselves into new and improved forms that were proof of their manliness and cultural attainment.

Reference (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2003). Chocolate was photographed nude by the Hungarian photographer Aladar Hajdu, in his Havana studio “Rembrandt,” located on the Paseo del Prado. See: Alejandro G. Alonso, Pedro Contreras, and Martino Fagiuoli, *Havana Deco* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), pp. 156-57; Juan Manuel Díaz Burgos, Mario Díaz Leyva, and Paco Salinas, *Cuba - 100 años de fotografía: antología de la fotografía cubana 1898 - 1998 : [exposición]* (Murcia: Mestizo, 1998). The African-American sculptor and artist Richmond Barthe was inspired after seeing Kid Chocolate in action, remembering “he moved like a ballet dancer.” See: Art Institute of Chicago and Susan F. Rossen, *African-Americans in Art: Selections from the Art Institute of Chicago* (Chicago: Institute in association with University of Washington Press, 1999); and Margaret Rose Vendryes, *Barthé: A Life in Sculpture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), p. 111.

⁷⁸²As shown in Chapter Two, this tendency to gauge Cuban culture through the lens of American norms was a defining characteristic of Cuban life in the period (and to a great extent, today). See Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

⁷⁸³As demonstrated in Chapter Two, M. Aramburu had been a proponent of the Cuban appropriation of physical culture since the early twentieth century. Mario Aramburo, “La Cultura Física y la Cultura Intelectual” *Diario de la Marina Numero Centenario, La Habana, Cuba* (La Habana: Úcar, García y Cía, 1932), pp. 58-59. This idea of Cuban culture as vacillating between the Hispanic legacy and the onslaught of American culture, broadly defined, is echoed by Cuban intellectual Fernando Ortiz: “...the attraction to Spain each day weaker across the Atlantic, and the attraction to North America every day stronger and closer.” Ortiz, *Pueblo Cubano*, quoted in Vicente Botín, *Los funerales de Castro* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2009) p. 24 (translation by author).

⁷⁸⁴Ibid.

Whether this quantitative and qualitative appraisal of the changes in Cuban men's bodies was accurate or not, Aramburo was reacting to the expansive changes in Cuban body culture of the 1920s that centered around the fascination with athletics, and boxing in particular, and the perception that national greatness was connected to the cultivation of imported ideas about physicality.⁷⁸⁵ Many influential Cubans rejected what they perceived as the backward and effeminate colonial legacy for the much vaunted morphologies emanating from the United States with its mass cultures of sport.⁷⁸⁶ The American opinion of Cuban men as “like a woman...weak and vacillating, flaccid and without fiber...wanting in appreciation for manliness for its own sake,” and characterized by an “effeminate spirit” had long pedigree in American views on Cuban men.⁷⁸⁷ The concern with the relationship between “effeminate” men and the health of society in general was not new in Cuba and Latin America (or elsewhere for that matter); but the use of “physical culture” as a curative agent was a distinctly modern means to address longstanding negative perceptions.⁷⁸⁸

⁷⁸⁵ There remains much research to be done on Cuban perceptions of the body in comparative context. There is no similar shortage of historical explorations of American perceptions of Cubans as effeminate and passive. See: Amy Kaplan, *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1993). As will be shown in this chapter, the extent of the Cuban appropriation of American style sport is cited as a measuring stick by various American observers the first decades of the twentieth century to describe perceptions of positive, American-style, changes in Cuban culture.

⁷⁸⁶ The popular magazine *Carteles*, for example, carried regular accounts of athletes like Jack Dempsey and Babe Ruth as “supermen,” who embodied normative masculine prowess. This will be examined in greater depth later in this chapter.

⁷⁸⁷ Quoted in: Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), pp. 85-86.

⁷⁸⁸ There is broad range of scholarship in literary studies, history, and anthropology that explores the importance of repressing effeminacy and vaunting masculinity in Latin American history. For example, Federico Garza Carvajal, looking at Colonial Mexico, shows Spain's attempts to promote vigorous masculinity in the colonies in order to stem and repress sodomy. Mott has shown a similar concern for safeguarding society via the Inquisition in Brazil's stance on the “corruption of youth” and effeminacy. For a broad overview of the history of homosexuality in Latin America in the early modern and colonial period see: Peter Herman Sigal, ed., *Infamous Desire: Male Homosexuality in Colonial Latin America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). For modern accounts of the state and attempts to suppress homosexuality and effeminacy as damaging to the social body see: James N. Green, *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003); Emilio Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) and Robert McKee Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). For the flip-side of importing

The process that Aramburu cited took place in the hectic racial climate of the 1920s, when the avenues of social advancement for Afro-Cubans were markedly decreasing amid the economic downturn resulting from falling sugar prices and the advent of world-wide depression.⁷⁸⁹ The idolization of rare Afro-Cuban celebrities like Kid Chocolate as masculine role models served as a pressure release for mounting social tensions that increasingly brought into question the promise of a “raceless” Cuban nationalism that celebrated the bloodshed of the cross-racial alliance during the Wars for Independence.⁷⁹⁰ If a poor Afro-Cuban from a shanty-

masculinity, see nineteenth century debates about the importation of foreign luxury goods as feminizing agents: Eugenia Roldán Vera and Marcelo Caruso, *Imported Modernity in Post-Colonial State Formation: The Appropriation of Political, Educational, and Cultural Models in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2007).

⁷⁸⁹ Rosalie Schwartz, “Cuba’s Roaring Twenties: Race Consciousness and the Column ‘Ideales de Una Raza;’ Keith Ellis, “Nicolás Guillen and Langston Hughes: Convergences and Divergences;” and Lisa Brock and Bijan Bayne, “Not Just Black: African-Americans, Cubans, and Baseball,” in Lisa Brock and Digna Castañeda Fuertes, eds, *Between Race and Empire African-Americans and Cubans Before the Cuban Revolution* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), pp. 104-20, 129-68, and 168-205, respectively. Frank Andre Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African-Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). For a more general overview of race in Cuba during this period see Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); and Tomás Fernández Robaina, *El negro en Cuba: 1902-1958 : apuntes para la historia de la lucha contra la discriminación racial* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias sociales, 1990).

⁷⁹⁰ There is an extensive literature on the central myth of “raceless” national identity in Republican Cuba. The most basic narrative was that cross-racial alliance in the Wars for Independence *should* provide Afro-Cubans and Euro-Cubans with equal routes to participate in the nation. This national myth differed significantly from other Latin American racial nationalisms such as those of Brazil and Mexico, where the mixing of races were widely reasoned to have created unique new combinations that were neither purely African, Indigenous, or European. In the Cuban case, “raceless” nationalism decried that Afro-Cubans and white Cubans, while remaining distinct racial groups, were entitled to social equality by virtue of equal sacrifice in the formative struggles for Independence. By the late-1920s, the dissonance between these ideas and the social reality of Afro-Cubans came increasingly under fire by a range of Cuban intellectuals and social activists. For the foundation and fundamental attributes of Republican Era constructions of race and social equality, and their shortcomings in practice see: Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share*; Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*; Jeffrey Grant Belnap and Raúl A. Fernández, *José Martí’s “Our America:” From National to Hemispheric Cultural Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Lillian Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). For a comparative treatment of the conception of race in Latin American during this period see: Richard Graham, ed., *The Idea of Race in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); Nancy P Appelbaum,., Thomas C. Holt, Anne S. Macpherson, Karin Alejandra Roseblatt, and Peter Wade, *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); and the groundbreaking Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991). There is an extensive related historiography of race and nation in Brazil. The fundamental work on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries remains Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black Into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974). Important recent studies on race and nation in Brazil include Jerry Dávila, *Diploma of Whiteness: Race and Social Policy in Brazil, 1917-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); and Peter M. Beattie, *The Tribute of Blood: Army, Honor, Race, and Nation in Brazil, 1864 – 1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). All of these works explore state and social

town of Havana could excel by international standards of masculinity to gain prominence and wealth, wasn't this type of bootstrapping available to all? The answer, clearly, was no; but the print media, theater, and radio had long waged a campaign to sanctify the images of talented athletes as a point of cross-racial cohesion and national solidarity.⁷⁹¹

This chapter analyzes how print media, political and civic-social groups, and pamphleteers interpreted and enshrined the novel practice of physical culture and pugilism in the 1920s as a harbinger of national progress and virility and as a focal point for Cuban prestige. This controversial international movement in popular culture was nationalized through the concerted efforts of editorialists, political figures, and civic society to forge Cuban national identity through the appropriation of a once foreign and marginal practice into mainstream enunciations of *cubanidad*. This clear impulse in Cuban public sphere melded cosmopolitan admiration for foreign athlete-celebrities with a didactic language of national regeneration and

institutions and their attempts to mold and whiten Brazilians through education and the military, respectively. For Mexico, the fundamental work on the ideas of race and mestizaje is José Vasconcelos' *The Cosmic Race*, which has been reprinted a number of times and Didier Tisdell Jaén, *The Cosmic Race: A Bilingual Edition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

⁷⁹¹ Before the rise of Kid Chocolate, other Cuban celebrities had gained international prominence such as the chess player Raúl Capablanca (1888-1942). Capablanca was the son of Spanish army officer, born in Cuba, who was and is regarded as one of the greatest chess players of all time; a "human chess machine." He was educated at Columbia University in New York and spent most of his life outside of Cuba. He enjoyed somewhat of a cult following throughout his life and many books since his death have detailed his ingenious strategies and dramatic victories abroad. He is important here as an example of the Cuban tendency, in the early years of the twentieth century, to view the conquest of titles and championships outside of Cuba as the most important measuring stick of individual worth. To defeat Americans and other foreigners, on their home ground, was touted as proof of Cuban achievement in a competitive environment. One had to transcend the geographic borders of the island to be held in high esteem on the island. There is a broad historical literature of his career, but no studies that place him within the narrative of Cuban national identity as a symbol of the Cuban intellect and an embodiment of aspirations to achieve in the broader international sphere. As with popular athletic heroes, the impact of his image in Cuban history has been relegated to anecdotal and largely detached hagiographies. See, for example, José Raúl Capablanca and Fred Reinfeld, *The Immortal Games of Capablanca* (New York: Dover, 1990); Isaak Maksovich Linder and V. I. Linder, *José Raúl Capablanca: Third World Chess Champion* (Milford, CT, USA: Russell Enterprises, Inc, 2010). As Kid Chocolate remembered in a 1987 documentary about his life, "My fixation, every since I was a boy, was to get to Madison Square Garden." cited in Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, p. 413.

the desire to emulate international symbols of modern masculinity such as celebrity athletes Jack Dempsey, Babe Ruth, George Carpentier, and Luis Ángel Firpo.⁷⁹²

The expansion of the national pantheon of heroic individuals to include Afro-Cuban athletes at the end of the 1920s was only possible after the success of this project. The most salient example of public sphere efforts to appropriate physical culture was the 1922 publication of *El Arte de los Puños*. This propagandistic “history,” examined in-depth in this chapter, explicitly linked the growing Cuban encounter of sport with positive and outward-looking currents in Cuban body culture. The language of this appropriation posed virile, masculine, and worldly men alongside the consumption of sport as a eugenic solution to a variety of perceived social ills. Ironically, the unintended consequences of the emergent Cuban boxing tradition were most visible in Afro-Cuban boxers who challenged racial norms while becoming the accidental faces of Cuba abroad. As this dissertation has shown, these trends were not unique to Cuba, but formed part of the increasingly global cultural industries that had become an integral part of Latin American culture by this period.

As Alejandro de la Fuente has argued, the official rhetoric of Cuban racelessness did open many (if not all) social spaces to Afro-Cubans that were denied African-Americans, sport was one of these.⁷⁹³ To build more broadly on these claims and to explore a novel sector of public sphere dialogue, I examine three related case studies from the 1920s: the concerted efforts of the press and civil society for the legalization of prizefighting that culminated in the

⁷⁹² There is much impressionistic evidence of the widespread appeal of early athletic celebrities, like Jack Dempsey, in Latin America. To date there have been only a handful of studies that have addressed the transfer and appropriation of these images in the region. See for example: Richard V. McGehee, “The Dandy and the Mauler in Mexico: Johnson, Dempsey, Et Al., and the Mexico City Press, 1919-1927”. *Journal of Sport History*. 23, no. 1: 20 (1996). This study gives basic information on the amount of press coverage generated by these two boxers, but gives little analysis of the nature of their reception and does not place them in a broader context.

⁷⁹³ De la Fuente argues that the official rhetoric of racelessness was a powerful tool for Afro-Cubans to press their claims for social equality. Though the most elite social clubs, for example, were generally closed to them, the type of official public segregation experienced in the American South was unknown in Cuba. De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*.

publication of the 1922 pamphlet *El Arte de los Puños*, the editorials, letters to the editor, and radio interpretations of transnational events like the 1923 racially constructed boxing match between Argentine Luis Ángel Firpo and American Jack Dempsey; and the late 1920s rise of Kid Chocolate and Eladio “Black Bill” Valdés as controversial symbols of Afro-Cuban participation in the imagination of a more inclusive nation. These case studies focus on transnational events and their significance as interpreted by journalist, Cubans from around the island, amateur and professional poets, and politicians as they strove to implant in the Cuban public the conviction that modern manliness lay in the pursuit of vigorous sport. Through these three events, Cuban social critics further constructed physical culture and the broader ideas it called upon as an essentially and necessarily Cuban *and* “Latin” pursuit that would grant entrance into competitive modernity.⁷⁹⁴

In the 1920s, Cuban racial nationalism and masculinity were increasingly mediated through the novel public appropriation of transnational modern sport.⁷⁹⁵ *Carteles*, the popular weekly magazine, along with other newspapers and pamphlets, regularly expressed this idea in direct and didactic language and exhorted its readers to buy the flags of the *patria* along with the

⁷⁹⁴ I use the term “competitive modernity” to characterize the individualistic pursuit of merit in the public sphere that became increasingly evident in this period. I argue that it marks a shift from social hierarchies based on inherited status and other older means to express and maintain social prestige. For other uses of this concept applied to a range of topics see: Lawrence E. Cahoone, *Cultural Revolutions: Reason Versus Culture in Philosophy, Politics, and Jihad* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005); Deborah James, Evelyn Mary Plaiice, and Christina Toren, *Culture Wars: Context, Models and Anthropologists' Accounts* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010). To date, this concept has not been applied in the study of Latin America.

⁷⁹⁵ Aside from hagiographical histories of Cuban boxers like *Azúcar and chocolate*, and *Kid Chocolate, El boxeo soy yo*, the only scholarly treatment of sport in twentieth century Cuba, Paula J. Pettavino, and GERALYN PYE, *Sport in Cuba: The Diamond in the Rough*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994)., has little analysis of the central role of Cuban sport in the public sphere in the 1920s. Major publications like the popular Havana revista *Carteles* regularly advertized clothing, equipment, and other articles to be embroidered with the sporting monikers of one’s team or athlete of choice. See for example: “Compre la bandera de su patria o de su club,” *Carteles*, December, 1921, p. 16.

flags of their athletic clubs.⁷⁹⁶ This point of convergence between civic social groups, omnipresent in the public life of Havana, and nationalist ideas hardened in this period.

As a range of scholars such as Rosalie Schwartz, Frank Guridy, and Louis A. Pérez, Jr. have shown, nationalist Afro-Cuban intellectuals such as Gustavo Urrutia and Nicolás Guillén forged transnational ties with such African-American thinkers such as Langston Hughes and the Afro-Puerto Rican Arthur Schomburg in an attempt to broaden the scope of Afro-Cuban political and social engagement with African-American struggles for social equality.⁷⁹⁷ Though most of the scholarship on these deepening intercultural relationships of communication and mutual concern for Americans and Cubans of African descent focuses on discriminatory practices that prevented the collective betterment of their people, both groups of intellectuals were intensely interested in the celebration and encouragement of Afro-Cuban and African-American achievements in a broad array of pursuits, including the “democratic” and potent public sphere created by sport. This study of Afro-Cuban celebrity and nationalization of foreign cultures complicates our understanding of how race, identity, and masculinity functioned in the interstices between institutional practices of racism and the lived experience of race. I de-center the state in order to focus on the efforts of civil society to foment cultural appropriation and change, often in open conflict with government policies.⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁷ Boxers Kid Chocolate and Black Bill were well known not only in Cuba, but became fixtures of the Harlem social scene in the 1920s. Boxing was one of the few sports of the era that was not officially segregated and black boxers enjoyed enormous social prestige during the Harlem Renaissance. See: Bruce Kellner, *The Harlem Renaissance: A Historical Dictionary for the Era* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1984) and Alex Antón and Roger E. Hernández, *Cubans in America: A Vibrant History of a People in Exile* (New York: Kensington Books, 2003).

⁷⁹⁸ This approach has been used by a small but growing number of scholars who investigate the cultures of race in Cuba in this period. Robin Moore’s study on the appropriation of Afro-Cuban music by the white middle and upper classes broke new ground in the understanding of race relations within popular culture. Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness Afro-Cubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997). Moore has since extended his analysis of music and cultural change in: *Music and Revolution: Cultural Change in Socialist Cuba* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). Vera Kutzinski examines race and the eroticization of Cubans of color in: Vera M. Kutzinski, *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism*

In addition to their critiques of structural racism in Cuba and the United States, Guillén and Uruttúa argued that the athletic accomplishments of Afro-Cubans should be used as tools to increase race consciousness and give weight to calls for social equality. The nearly universal acclaim for Cuban athletes in the black and white press, they argued, was an opportunity to collaborate with white Cubans on the common ground of national pride.⁷⁹⁹ For these Afro-Cuban activists, transnational athletes became vaunted representatives of Afro-Cuban *and* Cuban achievements within and beyond Cuba.⁸⁰⁰ More importantly, their notoriety was a focal point for broader debates about the Cuban-ness of Afro-Cubans. As we will see later in the chapter, these writers debated the divergent strategies of how to use the triumphs of Kid Chocolate to further their goals of racial integration and social equality.

As in the United States, race played a central and problematic role in the popular cultures surrounding sport in general and boxing in particular.⁸⁰¹ Cuban appropriation of imported cultural practices, from musical forms to foreign cinema to athletics, increased the array of Afro-Cuban cultural contributions to Cuban national identity and molded public discussions on the nature of Cuban modernity. Through the concerted efforts of reformers aided by improvisation

(Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993). Another important study, examining similar issues of popular music in Brazil is: Hermano Vianna, *The Mystery of Samba: Popular Music & National Identity in Brazil*, trans. John Charles Chasteen (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

⁷⁹⁹ These debates are examined in-depth later in this Chapter.

⁸⁰⁰ As discussed in Chapter One, I use the term “transnational” athletes to describe the novel social position of Afro-Cubans who lived and worked a considerable portion of their careers outside of the island but whom through the international press and regular returns to the island maintained a presence in the public construction of racial nationalism, masculinity, and modernity. This approach, for boxers in particular, has been pioneered by Theresa Runstedtler in her examination of the transnational world of African-American boxers in the early to mid twentieth century. See Theresa Runstedtler, *Journeymen: Race, Boxing, and the Transnational World of Jack Johnson* (Ph.D. Thesis--Yale University, 2007).

⁸⁰¹ There is an extensive literature on race, masculinity, and boxing in the United States during this period. The most substantial works are Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Al-Tony Gilmore, *Bad Nigger! The National Impact of Jack Johnson* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1975); Andrew M. Kaye, *The Pussycat of Prizefighting: Tiger Flowers and the Politics of Black Celebrity* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Randy Roberts, *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes* (New York: Free Press, 1983.); Jeffrey T. Sammons, *Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Michael T. Isenberg, *John L. Sullivan and His America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Peter Benson, *Battling Siki A Tale of Ring Fixes, Race, and Murder in the 1920s* (Little Rock: Univ of Arkansas Press, 2008).

and epoch defining changes in the speed and availability of both written and aural information, Cubans experienced the dramatic personalities and encounters of modern sport as representatives of the broadening of *cubanidad*.⁸⁰²

These public displays of “virility,” as they were often labeled, were experienced through both the attainment of “sporting” knowledge and through acting the part, playing the games: sport as a transnational medium and the cross-class engagement of Cubans with boxing revealed aspirations to excel on an international stage where individual prestige was attainable through democratic access to sport. The success of Cuban “sportmen” in the implantation of boxing as a gauge of masculine behavior was proclaimed as a measuring stick of Cuban modernity and cultural attainment in an era when daily comparisons with international counterparts increasingly formed a basis for rapidly evolving cultural composites.

The saturation of 1920s Cuba with foreign standards for masculine behavior illustrates both the conscious and improvisational emulation of *lo extranjero* that forms key aspects of modern Cuban identity.⁸⁰³ Sport was new forum in which to show how Cubans were able to

⁸⁰² A range of scholars have located sport as central to enunciations of modern *cubanidad*. This has been made explicit in: Thomas Carter, “Baseball Arguments: “*Aficionismo* and Masculinity at the Core of *Cubanidad*,” in J.A. Mangan and LaMartine P. Dacosta, eds. *Sport in Latin American Society: Past and Present* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002), pp. 117-39. Rosalie Schwartz cites sport as one of the emblematic factors of rapidly changing Cuban culture in 1920s, linking it with government and civic social initiatives to make Cuba more attractive for tourists: Rosalie Schwartz, *Pleasure Island: Tourism and Temptation in Cuba* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

⁸⁰³ Pérez, Jr. had convincingly argued that pre-Revolutionary Cuban national identity was intertwined with the consumption of popular culture originating in the United States. See: Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*. His arguments, largely drawing on print media, memoirs, cinema and novels is supported by several studies of other forms of mass communication that showed, in this era and later, a high saturation with American imagery, language, music and other forms of cultural diffusion. See: Oscar López, *La Radio en Cuba* (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2002); and Michael B. Salwen, *Radio and Television in Cuba: The Pre-Castro Era* (Ames, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1994). This argument, though in altered form, holds true even today (2010). Though much of the Socialist Cuban state’s nation building project explicitly rejects most U.S. culture as decadent and imperialist, U.S. popular culture is still highly visible on the island. This is most evident in music, film, and other cultural expressions such as dress and language.

learn, train their bodies, and manage the complexities of celebrity; the result was an expansion of the public sphere.⁸⁰⁴

Across the class-spectrum, Cuban men reveled in self-applying the honorific title of “sportman,” and sought to cultivate the values self-reliance, fairness, and excellence through the training of bodies and knowledge of the world through sport. *Knowing* the American boxer Jack Dempsey through reading his biometrics and his biography and emulating his appearance was a way to show one’s own manliness and dedication to a transnational world view. Cuban entrepreneurs, politicians, and public intellectuals alike prescribed and encouraged the conditions in which lower-class Cuban athletes could pursue international titles for the explicit construction of national prestige. In the process, they assured themselves that Cuba was free of racial prejudice, democratic, and above all, modern.

The practice of sport had, since the late nineteenth century, been identified and recommended by Cuban social critics as means to teach masculine values that, among other boons to the social body, would help to stem effeminacy and homosexuality.⁸⁰⁵ The image and culture of the modern, robust male athlete was praised by these social commentators as both a eugenic solution to perceived social ills and a contrast between “backward” Hispanic cultural

⁸⁰⁴ The use of success in sport as a focal point of national cohesion and means to celebrate nationality is certainly not unique to Cuba. Interestingly, the deep social changes that accompanied the Cuban Revolution and the attempted construction of the “New Socialist Man,” served to make sport an even more central (and politically manipulated) marker of Cuban identity and national pride. Most studies of Cuban sport emphasize the radical changes in athletic practice ushered in by the Revolution, particularly the outlawing of professional sport in 1961. There is an interesting study yet to be done on the continuities in public discourse, ideas of the body, and the role of sport in national identity across the Pre and Post Revolutionary period. The best works on sport in Cuba are: Paula J. Pettavino , and GERALYN PYE, *Sport in Cuba: The Diamond in the Rough* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994).

⁸⁰⁵ Emilio Bejel examines the late nineteenth century writings of the Cuban intellectual and Independence leaders Enrique José Varona and Benjamin Céspedes de Santa Cruz that characterize the practice of sport, baseball in this case, as “moral and manly,” and evidence of Cuban modernity versus the backward and brutal tradition of bullfighting. This theme is updated in the 1920 novel *Generales y Doctores* by Carlos Goveira. Emilio Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.), pp. 32-35.

traditions and the development of “modern” cultural forms.⁸⁰⁶ The qualitative changes and quantitative increase of new media, from the stand-alone sports page and dedicated sports magazines to radio broadcasts of boxing matches, facilitated Cuban engagement with sport. Following the Cuban Wars for Independence, athletics became arguably the most salient public venue for Cuban men to display their masculine knowledge and behavior.⁸⁰⁷

Cubans, the state and the media stressed, were athletes on par with international idols like the Americans Jack Dempsey and Jack Johnson, the Argentine Luis Ángel Firpo, and the French Georges Carpentier. Cubans were not, proponents of sport argued, the effeminate and decadent victims of backward Spanish colonialism that foreigners often portrayed them to be. From Paris to Buenos Aires to New York, Cuban athletes represented the *patria* as a masculine and modern player in an increasingly global culture.⁸⁰⁸

Looking beyond what was traditionally “Cuban” to enliven and enrich domestic life was also a problematic solution to perceived Cuban insularity and backwardness; the Cuban “tendency” toward emulation was often cited to detract from the process of modernization through sport. Social critics like Jorge Mañach mocked those who touted such ridiculous foreign

⁸⁰⁶ The counterpoint to this argument, which failed to stem the Cuban appropriation of boxing, was voiced by conservatives groups like the above mentioned Association of Veterans, which focused on boxing and bullfighting as threats to the sacrifices they had made to the nation. Boxing was, they argued simply barbaric, while bullfighting was both barbaric and linked to the colonial past they had sought to sever.

⁸⁰⁷ The Cuban Wars for Independence were central to the construction of Cuban national identity as based on a cross-racial alliance and sacrifice for the elevation of the *patria*. The image of the white martyr José Martí was often portrayed in tandem with the black martyr and General Antonio Maceo as symbolic of the “racelessness” of Cuban nationalism. This idea of racelessness became a focal point for debates on race during the Republican Period (1902-1959). See: Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*; Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share*; and Lillian Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

⁸⁰⁸ Beyond the scope of this project, the international travels of Cuban boxers such as the globetrotting “Goyito Rico” and the West-Indian/Afro-Cuban Ramón Castillo (who fought in France, Eastern Europe, Spain, the United States) in the 1920s would make a fascinating study of Afro-Cuban agency. Some of this work has been begun by amateur historian Kevin Smith, in his groundbreaking study *The Sundowners: The History of the Black Prizefighter, 1870-1930*. Vol. II, Part 1. (CCK Publications, 2006). It remains for another study to trace the transnational history of this generation of Afro-Cuban diasporans who became polyglots, businessmen, and local heroes thanks to their mastery of boxing.

innovations as a panacea for Cuban social ills. He spoke for many observers when he defined the outwardly looking sport fan as a servile copier of foreign forms who displayed novel behaviors and fashions in a comical attempt to display masculinity and status. Sportmen “showed their biceps” and preferred American cigarettes, they were braggarts and tools of American economic and cultural imperialism.⁸⁰⁹ Other observers, like journalists and authors Vicente Cubillas and Bernardino San Martín, wrote extensively on Cuban physical culture to counter those who sought to repress further engagement with transnational sport.

This process of selective appropriation was furthered in the early twentieth-century largely through the efforts of cosmopolitan oriented journalists who viewed the attainment of specialized knowledge and mastery of sport as a gauge of Cuban national progress expressed in the language of positive eugenics.⁸¹⁰ They used the high-circulation press to express their particular views on preferable behaviors for Cuban men. Journalists and social activists argued that American, Northern European, and increasingly, Cuban athletes, were paragons of virile behavior, and interpreted transnational media events as focal points for didactic lessons from and for mass culture. Proponents of sport divided modern Cuban masculinity from the more sedate and purely cerebral standard of behavior that, they argued, was parasitical to the national body. The development of physically powerful masculine bodies, reformers argued, was necessary to create moral and intellectually superior individuals and nations.⁸¹¹ José Sixto de Sola, one of the most important public intellectuals of the era, posed the issue in no uncertain terms:

In this century [20th]...those nations marching at the head of civilization pay ever more attention to every class of sport, as much as to intelligence..and their

⁸⁰⁹Jorge Mañach, *Glosas* (Habana, 1924). Francisco José Castellanos drew a similar conclusion in 1915, when he viewed the recent rise in the popularity of boxing as a shameful imitation of and appeasement of American tourists: “All those spectacles that offer attraction for the tourist: the races, boxing, cabarets. They are a disgrace. The foreigner comes here to find what is not permitted in his own country. Francisco José Castellanos, *Poca Cosa*, 1915; Cited in Louis Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, p. 165.

⁸¹⁰ Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*.

⁸¹¹ José Sixto de Sola, “El Deporte Como Factor Patriótico y Sociológico.”

publications, even the most cerebral and serious, dedicate [to sport] a preferential space, and their educators, sociologists and governors earnestly study the considerable social forces that sport develops...along with other social factors, toward collective betterment.⁸¹²

Intellectuals such as Sixto de Sola praised and acted on these ideas by founding gyms, importing foreign athletes, and funding Cubans who showed promise in sport. Sixto de Sola, for example, became President of the middle-class *Club Atlético de Cuba*.⁸¹³ Embodying the characteristics of a “sportman” was a sought after informal social title that signified cosmopolitanism, male camaraderie, and mastery of new forms of knowledge. Women, in their assigned role as the domestic molders of men, were encouraged to expose their male children to boxing to teach them the most essential characteristics of manliness.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, modern sport was inextricably tied to “national” attributes and racial proclivities and was often portrayed as an integral part of European-derived cultural traditions. Cubans, Mexicans, Argentines, Panamanians, Puerto Ricans, and other Latin Americans discerned within sport a novel and positive force for social change that could be detached from its origins and implanted in rapidly growing urban areas. In Cuba, more so than in other Latin American nations, this process of cultural appropriation was accelerated by the presence of foreign athletes and entrepreneurs who trained, taught, and performed in front of curious Cuban spectators.⁸¹⁴ Sport was depicted as an ideal democratic space where class mobility, especially tied to the lucrative possibilities of professional athletics,

⁸¹³ ANC, Fondo Asociaciones, Exp. Club Atlético de Cuba. San Martín, *El Arte de los Puños*; See Chapter Two.

⁸¹⁴ The visual and written evidence of this presence is overwhelming. Though compared with Mexican archives like the Enrique Díaz collection in the AGN, few pictures remain of these athletes. Most visual proof comes from the almost daily newspaper coverage of local sport and international boxers who toured in Cuba. The influence of foreigners in this process through their “teaching and encounters” was cited as a boon to the evolution of Cuban prizefighting. See, for example, “Jason” “Algo de Boxeo y de Nuestros Boxeadores,” *Carteles*, December 1921, p. 24. The Cuban circuit became a regular stop for dozens of American boxers, increasingly in the 1930s and 1940s.

was possible based solely on individual merit detached from class and previous social status.⁸¹⁵

As historians Louis Pérez, Jr. and Robin Moore have shown, the formation of modern Cuban cultural identity took place in this highly mediated environment where foreign, especially American, cultural forms saturated representations of modernity and progress, material culture, and social status. Sport, even in the form of two men (and sometimes women) pummeling each other in a boxing ring, constituted a sampling of international culture rich with symbolism.⁸¹⁶

As Nancy Stepan and Alejandra Bronfman have suggested, the pseudo-science of eugenics enjoyed widespread intellectual dissemination and problematic acceptance among the Latin American elite during this period. Latin American social engineers like José Vasconcelos in Mexico, molded these relatively static ideas of racial hierarchies and social progress to the diverse ethnic and racial mixtures that characterized Latin American nations. He argued that the future of humanity lay in the melding of distinct peoples and the refining of positive characteristics belonging to the constituent parts. In the public realm, these “scientific” ideas were reflected and disseminated by journalists who translated these macro-social prescriptions into the public sphere.⁸¹⁷ Despite these intellectual abstractions, the lived perceptions of race constantly undermined the proscriptive admonitions on racial superiority espoused by Spencerian influenced social scientists.⁸¹⁸ If sport was not just brute force, as influential Latin American

⁸¹⁵ “Democratic Sport” was an idea that extended back to at least the 1880s in a variety of sources. The rise of mass culture detached previous aristocratic activities like fox hunting, horse racing and yachting, from the highly accessible new mass spectacles of baseball and boxing and the more middle-class phenomenon of cycling. See for example: *Outing and the Wheelman* (Boston: Wheelman Co, 1884), p. 222; John Hughson, Marcus Free, and David Inglis, *The Uses of Sport: A Critical Study* (London: Routledge, 2005); William C. Smith, *Latin American Democratic Transformations: Institutions, Actors, and Processes* (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). Sport continues to be a central part of many Latin American nations’ democratizing projects.

⁸¹⁶ On the myriad cultural expressions of this era associated with boxing and boxers see Boddy, *Boxing: A Cultural History*; and Rundstedtler, *Journeymen*.

⁸¹⁷ Historians like Pablo Piccato are increasingly looking to public sphere to illuminate the lived experience of imported ideas in this period. Pablo Piccato, “Politics and the Technology of Honor: Dueling in Turn-of-the-Century Mexico”. *Journal of Social History*. 33 (1999), no. 2: 331-354 and Pablo Piccato, *The Tyranny of Opinion: Honor in the Construction of the Mexican Public Sphere* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁸¹⁸ Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*.

cultural mediators argued, how were the supposed genetically inferior and culturally backward Afro-Cubans able to appropriate the forms of knowledge and skill that made them successful athletes? How were they the most salient examples of the Cuban appropriation of a body culture whose transnational idols were not only white Americans African-Americans and Africans like Harry Wills and Amadou M'Barick Fall (a.k.a Battling Siki)?⁸¹⁹

Even marginal politico-ideological groups (like the Communist Youth) reproduced imagery of the Afro-Cuban male body in the pursuit of honorific and lucrative titles (i.e. Heavyweight “throne” or “champion”). This imagery and the accompanying rhetoric were self-examinations that celebrated the accomplishments of mostly lower-class athletes in their competition against foreign professionals. Having little basis in the long tradition of the Cuban media, such representation of Afro-Cuban celebrity was subject to high degrees of improvisation as Cuban newspapers and *revistas* both reacted to and molded the public perceptions of a cross-racial group of international celebrities. The images of African-American, Afro-Cuban, and European athletes and their fellow travelers saturated the visual experience of life in Havana and entered into popular memory through consumption of images and narratives associated with transnational masculine symbols.⁸²⁰ By 1923, even illiterate Cubans gathered to hear, via the new technology of radio broadcasts, the blow by blow racial dramas of boxing matches between Latin Americans, Americans, Africans, and Europeans.

⁸¹⁹ Battling Siki was Senegalese by birth and moved to France as a teenager. At the age of 15, he became a professional boxer and later enlisted in the French Army where, like George Carpentier, he was cited for bravery in battle. After the war, he became one of the most popular world lightweight boxers and like many Afro-descended boxers of the era was forced to navigate complex racial prohibitions to exercise his profession. In 1925, at the age of 28, he was shot and killed under mysterious circumstances while stumbling home drunk from a bar near his home in New York City. See Peter Benson, *Battling Siki: A Tale of Ring Fixes, Race, and Murder in the 1920s* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006).

⁸²⁰ Though it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, there have been dozens of subsequent hagiographical accounts of Cuban athletes produced throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. Even today, the most central space in Havana is home to a ten foot reproduction of the face of Kid Chocolate. See the Epilogue to this dissertation.

By the late 1920s, the few public venues for the expression of Afro-Cuban identity celebrated athletes like Kid Chocolate and Black Bill as evidence of Cuban accomplishment and racial pride. From the weekly column *Ideales de una Raza*, a number of Afro-Cubans and African Americans praised athletes as paradigmatic embodiments of *cubanidad*.⁸²¹ That these narratives were highly manipulated to increase the earning potential of such spectacles was largely beside the point; it was the oft enunciated perceptions of these events and their impact on the Cuban public sphere in this period that form the narrative of the present chapter.

El Arte de los Puños (The Fistic Art) and the Search for the New Cuban Man

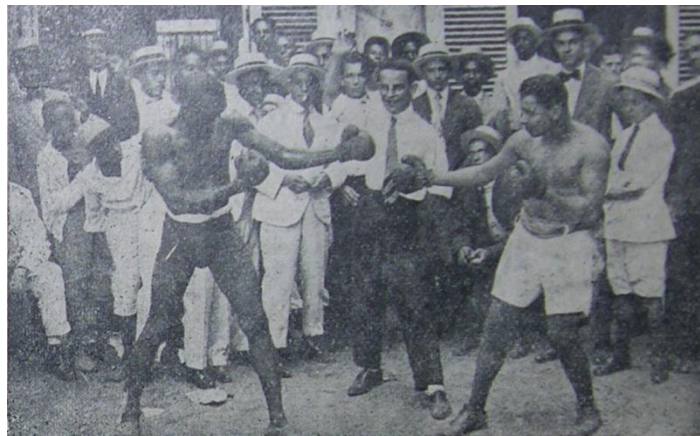
The 1920s boom in the popularity of the physical culture in Cuba corresponded to widespread international legalization of prizefighting, the efforts of promoters and politicians, and the growing celebrity of rags to riches foreign fighters like Jack Dempsey, Jack Johnson, the “elegant” French war hero Georges Carpentier, and the Argentine “Wild Bull of the Pampas,” Luis Ángel Firpo.⁸²² This public sphere appropriation was couched in eugenic language that sought to instill masculine values based on imported ideas about the body and methods of national regeneration. The 1923 match between Dempsey and Firpo was a focal point for the enunciation of these ideas and will be examined later in the next section. First, I examine an explicit attempt by writers and activists to nationalize pugilism in Cuba through constructing traditions that placed participation and specialized knowledge of international sport as fundamental aspects of public sphere masculinity. They sought to change the terms of debate over violent pastimes from that of foreign racial conundrum to an enunciation of Cuban progress.

⁸²¹Guillén, *Ideales de una Raza*.

⁸²²The saturation of Cuban media with the biographies of these international celebrities was complemented by their highly public appearances on the island. See: Roberto González Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana: A History of Cuban Baseball* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999); John Peter Sugden, *Boxing and Society: An International Analysis* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1996).

Daily coverage of virile foreign celebrities was not enough; two journalists published a lengthy pamphlet as a plea to the Cuban public and government to support their efforts.

In the first lines of their promotional history of boxing in Cuba, *El Arte de los Puños* (1922) (The Fistic Art), Cuban authors Bernardino San Martín and Vicente Cubillas propose to create culture: to “make the nation.”⁸²³ Both authors claimed over a decade’s experience in the (often-illegal) promotion of Cuban boxing and had organized illicit prizefights behind closed doors in the patio of the building that housed the newspaper *Cuba* in Old Havana and distant from the capital in even the smallest towns on the island.⁸²⁴ The authors praised the owner and director of the newspaper, the elderly, Spanish-born political agitator José Maria Villaverde, for allowing them to hold the clandestine matches on his property. There they hid from the police in a ring located on the inner patio of the building.



First (interracial) match in offices of *Cuba*, Boxer on the left is the Afro-Cuban Armenteros, the tailor. On the right is Louis Smith, Bernardino San Martín serves as referee. 1918. *El arte de los puños*.

⁸²³Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, *El Arte de los Puños*.

⁸²⁴ For example, they recount a trip to the town of Aguacate (a Hershey sugar mill town in Havana Province), where they chided the local residents for their fascination with baseball and relative disinterest in boxing. This, Cubillas and San Martín implied, was proof of their backwardness and quaint small town insularity. The baseball players, they mocked, wore their uniforms in public twenty-four hours before the game and the imagine they “even slept in them.” See: Allen Ray Kahn and Le Roy Samuel Weatherby, *Sugar; A Simple Treatise on Beet Sugar Manufacture* (Los Ángeles: U.S. Sugar Publications Co, 1921), p. 70; and *El Arte de los Puños*, pp. 218-19. There are few extant copies of this daily newspaper, too few to gain more than an impressionistic picture of the public discourse it created or sought to mold.

The above picture shows the interracial and informal nature of early, illegal, and Cuban-organized boxing matches held in the patio of the building housing the newspaper *Cuba*.⁸²⁵ These matches took place on Sundays and judging by the dress of most of the adult spectators they were fairly prominent events. The first fights took place without the construction of a boxing ring, which would follow as these matches became more popular.

Cubillas and San Martín lauded the recent legalization of prize fighting under the newly elected mayor of Havana. Boxing had been outlawed (once again) since 1919, following the ring death of an Afro-Cuban sailor in the National Navy, José “Joe” Marroquín, in the *Recreo de Belascoín* stadium on the outskirts of Central Havana. The authors pass over this tragic event, citing medical findings, and creatively arguing that his death had not been due to any trauma suffered during the bout, but because he had eaten moments before entering the ring. There was no harm in boxing, they explained, and the benefits for Cuban virility were so numerous that the exclusion of the sport was an anti-patriotic act.⁸²⁶ A review of the major newspapers published during the time of Marroquín’s death shows them to be conspicuously lacking in coverage of that tragic event.⁸²⁷ Given the connections of major newspaper figures to the movement to popularize and legalize prizefighting, this lack of coverage suggests that this information was

⁸²⁵ “Cuban-organized” is key here because Cubillas and San Martín railed against foreigners and their allies in the Cuban government who had been able to hold boxing matches, sometimes lucrative ones, throughout the 1910s. The authors self-promoted as a purely Cuban enterprise.

⁸²⁶ The death of José Marroquín is a telling case study in race, sport, and the media in Republican Cuba. In the days following the fatal bout, newspapers in the capital carried almost no news or explanation of the event, even though the Mayor of Havana wrote a scathing denunciation of the boxing as a social danger. This same year, the death of a white Cuban youth during a basketball game generated an enormous amount of media coverage, including a public funeral procession and numerous elegies. I argue that members of the sporting press like Cubillas and San Martín, likely downplayed the ring death in an attempt to shield boxing from negative attention. Also, the fact that the youth who died during a basketball game was a white member of the aristocratic Vedado Tennis Club, likely fueled public expressions of grief.

⁸²⁷ *El Diario de la Marina, El Mundo, El Día*, have no mention of Marroquín’s death.

suppressed or at least downplayed by the Havana press. In comparison, the death during a basketball game of one of the cities elite youth in this period received wide press coverage.⁸²⁸

Despite these attempts to downplay the tragic death of Marroquín, Havana Mayor Varona Suárez, raged against the promoters of boxing in a letter to the authors:

Boxing is savage, it is barbarous. Don't imagine that you will receive a single permit to celebrate these sordid *fiestas*. While I'm mayor of Havana, and while I can deny permits for this barbarous sport, I will do so. Don't encourage Cubans to box; this is for foreigners, for North Americans, they are 'made' for such things.⁸²⁹

Cubillas and San Martín, despite the push back from the Havana government, posit that the cultivation of boxing as a “manly and beautiful” sport will stimulate a variety of social goods and stem the “hateful” use of revolvers and cutting weapons (*armas blancas*) that have for so long reigned among “the People” and that till then had terrorized the public sphere.⁸³⁰ Though it may seem anachronistic, the implantation of modern sport as a “noble” and “patriotic” act was widely hailed in Latin America as a civilizing pursuit, on par with building railroads, extending electric service and modernizing the backward behaviors of the lower classes.⁸³¹

⁸²⁸ Andrés Diago y Guell was a young basketball player and member of the aristocratic Vedado Tennis Club (VTC). He died after an accident on the court and was treated to a public funeral and procession where his remains were carried on the shoulders of representatives of the VTC, the *Club de Dependientes*, and the *Club Atlético de Cuba*. He was buried wrapped in the flag of the VTC. *Carteles*, December 1921, p. 6. See also the account in León Primelles, *Crónica cubana, 1919-1922: Menocal y la Liga Nacional* (Habana: Editorial Lex, 1957). As in Mexico in the same period, sports like basketball and baseball were largely beyond reproach, they shared few of the sordid characteristics of boxing.

⁸²⁹ Varona Suarez was a progressive politician who sponsored such projects as public libraries and discount public cafeterias. He vacillated in his position on the suitability of boxing for the Cuban temperament. While he outlawed boxing in Havana during his term in office, he later supported and even sponsored local boxing tournaments (as will be shown later in the chapter). Unión Panamericana, *Boletín*, Vol. 44 (1917), p. 247; and León Primelles, *Crónica cubana, 1915-1918: la reelección de Menocal y la Revolución de 1917; la danza de los millones; la primera Guerra Mundial* (Habana: Editorial Lex, 1955).

⁸³⁰ Vicente Cubillas and Bernardino San Martín, *El Arte de los Puños*.

⁸³¹ On violent sport and modernity see: Amalio Blanco Abarca, Elisa Larrañaga Rubio, and Santiago Yubero Jiménez, *Convivir con la violencia* (Navarra: Universidad Pública de Navarra, 2007).

San Martín and Cubillas promoted their public image as the foremost proponents of this modernizing process.⁸³² Both authors were journalists whose daily coverage of international sport embedded them in a comparative framework in which they judged Cuban society as lacking in the “manliness” and will-power that constituted prime symbols of healthy, forward thinking nations.⁸³³ These social conundrums had a solution: if only the government would allow the incipient process of cultural change associated with the learning and dissemination of athletic practice, Cubans could forge ahead as a progressive and increasingly virile people. Civil society, they implied, had outpaced the government in its progressive appropriation of modern behaviors. The intransience of powerful members of the political class was impediment to healthy change.⁸³⁴

Modern physical culture as a moral system was a powerful tool capable of stemming the atavistic criminal impulses that respected social critics and scientists like Fernando Ortiz and Israel Castellanos saw as endemic in the unique Cuban mixture of races and ethnicities.⁸³⁵ As Alejandra Bronfman has shown, elite Cubans worried that the “accident” of progress had placed “delinquent” races, Afro-Cubans in particular, in an untenable position.⁸³⁶ Unable to navigate the rapidly changing modern urban milieu, Afro-Cubans were thought to be prone to acts of violence and witchcraft. Though it is difficult to gauge the diffusion of these ideas portrayed in “scientific” texts like those produced by Fernando Ortiz (i.e. *Los negros brujos*), the evidence

⁸³² There are no studies on violence or perceptions of violence in Cuba during this period. Impressionistic evidence suggests, however, that public violence was a prevalent fear in Havana during this period, with countless examples of stabbings and shootings making headlines in newspapers. Bernardino San Martín had been trained as a boxer by the Chilean boxer Juan “John” Budinich, starting in 1910. He had several boxing matches, his last in 1915 against the Sino-Cuban boxer Victor Achán; afterwards dedicating himself to promoting matches and journalism.

⁸³³ Ibid.

⁸³⁴ Ibid.

⁸³⁵ See Ortiz, *Los negros brujos* and Israel Castellanos, *Contribución al estudio craneométrico del hombre negro delincuente* (Habana: [s.n.], 1916); Castellanos, *La brujería y el ñañiguismo en Cuba, desde el punto de vista médico-legal* (Habana: Lloredo, 1916).

⁸³⁶ Bronfman, *Measures of Equality*.

through popular media representations and works like *El Arte de los Puños* suggests that by the early 1920s Cubans involved in transnational sport had come to reject the idea of fixed moral/racial constitutions among Afro-Cubans. The education and training that were key elements of modern sport were capable of creating moral beings, even among the supposedly atavistic Afro-Cubans. Their public visibility and celebration of in sport during the first half of the Republic is an understudied counterpoint to what have been portrayed as the dominant representations of race in this period.

While contemporary studies by Ortiz and Castellanos focused on establishing racial divisions (determined by phrenology, biometrics, and craniology) to account for the relative backwardness of Cuban culture, Cubillas and San Martín portrayed a cross-racial class of Cubans who were equally endowed with the intelligence, dedication, and physical traits that yielded successful practitioners of transnational physical culture. Their portrayal of a racially mixed sector of Cuban society is a counterpoint to contemporary scientific ideas of racial determinism that have yielded much of the historiographical understanding of race in this period.⁸³⁷ A survey of newspapers (among them *El Diario de la Marina*, *El Herald de Cuba*, *El Mundo*, and the *Havana Post*), *revistas*, and other media of public discourse suggests that the most common visual and written portrayals of Afro-Cuban men were as criminals, servants, and as otherwise socially marginalized members of Cuban society.⁸³⁸ The increasing notoriety of Afro-Cuban and Sino-Cuban (among them Víctor Achán and Chau Aranguren) athletes paired with the laudatory

⁸³⁷ While acknowledging the omnipresent legacy of racial divisions during the Republican period as explored by Aline Helg, Alejandra de la Fuente, Tomás Fernández Robaina, this study seeks to complicate the historical understanding of lived racial identities during the period. While most Afro-Cubans were forced to live subaltern lives, athletes constituted a highly visible exception to this rule. Modern athletics created a new social space in which the contributions of Afro-Cubans to national pride were explicitly and often unequivocally recognized.

⁸³⁸ A study to quantify and qualify these ubiquitous visual representations of Afro-Cubans as a comically rendered servant class remains to be done.

reproductions of pictures and drawings of their semi-nude bodies in triumphant poses was a striking divergence from the negative portrayals of non-white Cubans so common in this period.



Participants and spectators in early bouts in Old Havana, *El Arte de los Puños*.

Organized and regulated violence in the public sphere was preferable to the social problems associated with the chaotic and deadly use of force to settle everyday disputes and in the early 1920s and Cubans hailed a “rebirth” of boxing as positive step toward the masculine regulation of impulse and modernity.⁸³⁹ Writers spoke of the “seed of boxing” that had “germinated” in Cuba and praised the “fearlessness” of those Cubans who took up the challenge.⁸⁴⁰ At issue, these writers hoped, was the civilized channeling of aggression and conflict into a productive, masculine, and modern behavioral form: the problem was not an inability to resolve mundane conflicts, but to do so in a modern and constructive manner. Cubans proudly published commentaries by foreigners, especially Americans, that lauded their

⁸³⁹“El Renacimiento del Boxeo,” *Carteles*, November, 1921.

⁸⁴⁰Jasón “Algo de boxeo y de nuestros boxeadores,” *Carteles*, December 1921, p. 24.

“advances” in the realm of sport as proof that “other nations should take note.”⁸⁴¹ San Martín and Cubillas, reacting to the prevalence of armed violence, present themselves and a long list of similarly inclined thinkers not just as lovers of sport, but as modernizers and social engineers whose motivation for the popularization and diffusion of athletics in general and pugilism in particular is intended to facilitate the “sporting betterment that will be realized within [their] young and glorious republic.”⁸⁴²

Imported sport, especially baseball, was not new in Havana. By the early 1920s, physical culture clubs were one of the most visible social units of the city and they served several interconnected purposes as points of socialization, symbols of social prestige, and a means to regulated competition.⁸⁴³ As integral elements of civil society, they often reflected the social divisions prevalent in Cuban culture, but also served to undermine them. In addition to interracial groups like those who held boxing “fiestas” in old Havana, other clubs organized around racial, ethnic and historical themes. Such suggestive names include: *Agrupación Hombres de Mañana*, *Aponte Sport Club*, *All American Baseball Club*, *Boxer Club de Cuba*, *Antillano Sport*, *Bohemia Sport Club*, *Asociación Cubana Clean and Jerk*, *Asociación Deportista Cubana Indian*, *Asociación de la Raza Trigueña y Mestiza (Sporting)*, *Asturias Sporting Club*, *Canarias Sport Club*, *the Cerro Atlético Club*, *the Cuba Base Ball Club de Personas de Color*, *the Lindbergh Sport Club*, and *the Amigos de Maceo (Sporting)*.⁸⁴⁴

⁸⁴¹ Dr. C.H. Mac Donald, “Cuba se esta haciendo una nación de atlética” *Carteles*, November 1921. As mentioned above, Cubans were well aware of the negative stereotypes held by Americans about the effeminacy of Cubans.

⁸⁴² Cubillas and San Martín, *El Arte de los Puños*.

⁸⁴³ In 1918, The Rotary Club, recently founded Havana, claimed that it had little explaining to do because Havana’s social organization was accustomed to club activity, indeed, it was “Habana—The Greatest Club City of the World.” See: *The Rotarian*, September 1918. There are well over one thousand social and athletic clubs whose charters are preserved in the Cuban National Archives, among them

⁸⁴⁴ The thousands of clubs dedicated to physical culture constitute an unstudied sector of the Cuban public sphere. Their records are housed in the ANC, *Registro Asociaciones*. For example, there are over 30 clubs listed alone whose title starts with “Deportista,”

Before independence, and increasingly after the advent of the Cuban Republic, sport became a focal point of social engagement, a means to “know” the outside world, and above all a *modus operandi*. Knowledge of these cosmopolitan practices and the attitudes associated with being an *aficionado de deporte* were a designator of social distinction; being a “Sportman” (the English term almost universally used) went hand in hand with being modern, masculine, and cultured. Public figures like Commandante Augusto York, ex-Mayor Varona Suárez and brothers Gonzalo y Eduardo López de la Torre organized competitions and “to develop to the best of their abilities the sport of boxing in the youth of our sporting societies, the National University, and High Schools of Havana.”⁸⁴⁵

Professional boxing and baseball were cited by Cuban social critics as examples of democratic spaces that, at least in part, proved that Cubans enjoyed a greater degree of racial equality than their counterparts in the United States. Conservative House of Representatives candidate and fiscal attorney Dr. Manuel Castellanos Mena reasoned the practice of boxing in Cuba was proof of racial and social equality:

In Cuba, lucky for us, no other differences have existed than those which are imparted by the different weight [classes]. In this field [boxing], we have given conclusive proof that our sentiments are more democratic and more liberal than those of the great American people, who disallowed the exhibition of the film of the fight between Johnson and Willard, and who desire that [Jack] Dempsey not dispute his championship with Harry Wills.⁸⁴⁶

⁸⁴⁵ These functions likely served the dual purpose of promoting sport to a broad range of Cubans and to identify potentially lucrative professionals in the making. The victors were awarded belts with the Cuban flag emblazoned on them. The efforts were given the imprimatur of the highest society in Cuba, including the “distinguished sportsmen General Pablo Mendieta, Doctor Manuel Varona Suarez, Coronel Rosendo Collazo, Dr. Estrada Mora, y Dr. Emilio de Marmol.” Oscar Massaguer, “De interes para los amantes de boxeo,” *Carteles*, August 1921.

⁸⁴⁶ Harry Wills, known by his fighting name, The Black Panther, was an African-American heavyweight challenger who was the number one contender for the title over his twenty year career (1911-1932). After Jack Johnson’s defeat by Jess Willard in 1915, African-Americans were prevented by the “color line” from challenging for the heavyweight title. See: Patrick Miller and David Wiggins, *Sport and the Color Line* (New York: Routledge Press, 2004).

Jack Dempsey, as interpreted for Cuban readers by Cubillas and San Martín, and other writers in the public sphere, was the ideal modern man. Writers described Dempsey's body as a "perfect and marvelous machine," in "the flower of life" with an "excellent physical and scientific preparation."⁸⁴⁷ In four years, Cuban readers learned, he had risen from the social status of a "vagabond" to the heights of celebrity. The American world champion came from the working (often unemployed) margins of *yanqui* society, and ascended the social ladder through dedication, individual talent, and an unwillingness to remain within the boundaries of a class-based society. He was also a paragon of complex American (in the hemispheric sense) racial identity: he refused to risk his title to the African-American contender Harry Wills, yet Dempsey admitted that he was of mixed racial heritage; "in his veins [ran] mixed together Scottish and Indian blood."⁸⁴⁸ This unwillingness to face an African-American challenger was cited by Cubans as a stain on his otherwise superhuman image.⁸⁴⁹ Cuban writers further commented negatively on his character, labeling him deficient in patriotic values for avoiding military service in the World War.⁸⁵⁰

In the 1920s, narratives of transnational athletes like Jack Dempsey and the famed French war-hero turned boxer, George Carpentier, filled the pages of Cuban newspapers and high-culture reviews. They were symbols which lower-class Cubans sought to imitate, using their names as pseudonyms in the ring, purchasing serialized images, and pursuing athletics as a

⁸⁴⁷ "Cronica de Mexico: Es Dempsey el Campeón del Mundo?" *Carteles*, October, 1921.

⁸⁴⁸ Whether or not Dempsey was part Native American, and there exists some doubt among his biographers, is largely beside the point. Dempsey prided himself on his supposed mixed racial heritage, arguing that it made him a more authentic America. Latin Americas were quick to acknowledge Dempsey's self-representation. See: Randy Roberts, *Jack Dempsey, the Manassa Mauler* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 118, 268..

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid. "Cronica de Mexico: Es Dempsey el Campeón del Mundo?," and José Albuérne, "Babe Ruth, el famoso beisbolista, es un Superhombre." *Carteles*, November 1921.

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid.

means of personal betterment and class mobility.⁸⁵¹ For example, an Afro-Cuban boxer from Matanzas fought under the name of “Black Dempsey” in the early 1920s alongside other Afro-Cubans like “Cuban Jack Johnson.” Books, magazines, and newspapers printed and reprinted their biometrics, their photographic images, and laudatory drawings of their faces and bodies. Cuban tobacco companies published images and brief biographies of Cuban and American athletes on boxing cards that were included in cigarette packs as incentives to buy their brands (See Figure 3).⁸⁵²



Figure 13: “Black Dempsey. Born in Matanzas [Cuba], 1899. Gift from Romeo y Julieta cigarettes, # 49,” circa 1923, private collection.

⁸⁵¹ This pairing of professional athletics with the upward mobility came in several forms including popular silent films. For example, *Calderilla*, which played in Havana in 1921 portrayed filial piety in action: a young boxer pursues a career in boxing to earn enough money to take care of his sick mother. See *Carteles*, December 1921.

⁸⁵² Cuban tobacco companies, such as Susini and Bock Ovalados Co., Romeo y Julieta, and La Estrella, included portraits of American and Cuban popular culture and athletic icons in the packaging. These serialized cards were among the first mass produced photographic images for popular consumption produced in Cuba. They were designed for collection in albums that were available for purchase from the respective companies. As early as 1915, coinciding with the Jack Johnson vs. Jess Willard match in Havana, the Susini Album could contain up to 1,300 images with subjects ranging from boxers and baseball players to Charles Darwin, Rembrandt, and Shakespeare. These Cuban sport cards are today highly sought after collectors items.

In this manner, Afro-Cubans who had previously been employed in cutting sugar cane, as stevedores, tailors, or soldiers entered Cuban popular consciousness as minor celebrities, worthy of admiration and imitation. Increasingly, Cuban athletes were represented as both elegant and masculine: their accomplishments in the ring admired alongside the expensive clothing and chivalrous behavior that characterized their highly public lives outside of sport.⁸⁵³ They were the embodiment of “sportmen.” The erotics of desire for masculine symbols such as these were ubiquitous on the streets of Havana. Images of their sculpted bodies greeted passersby in advertisements pasted to walls and arcades. The spectacles that took place in the public sphere in Havana on a regular basis taught lessons to Cuban men on how to be men:

The man who boxes is ennobled. Can you imagine a more noble action that demonstrates more pure thoughts than those that we see in the ring everyday when a defeated and sometimes bloodied man stretches out his hand without rancor or mental reserve to he who just produced that damage to his person and who is his defeater?⁸⁵⁴

“Sportmen,” paired interest and participation in physical culture with other honorific titles and associated themselves with men of the lower classes who entered the ring in pursuit of a better life. Though by the 1920s boxers in Cuba were almost uniformly drawn from the working class, an association with their professional culture was emblematic for young Cuban men from the middle and upper classes.⁸⁵⁵ These cosmopolitan professionals were self-proclaimed “harbingers” of modern Cuban national identity as a composite of local and transnational ideas. Mena, for example, justified and advertised his political candidacy partly on

⁸⁵³ The most salient representative of this type of celebrity was Eligio Sardiñas Montalvo, “Kid Chocolate.” The boxer toured Havana in expensive cars, reputedly had a different suit for every day of the week, and kept a scrapbook of pictures of his white female “conquests.” See: Elio Menéndez and Víctor Joaquín Ortega, *Kid Chocolate, "el boxeo soy yo--"* (Ciudad de La Habana: Editorial ORBE, 1980).

⁸⁵⁴ Mena, *El Arte de los Puños*.

⁸⁵⁵ Though there are no statistical figures on the races of the hundreds of Cuban boxers in this period, those that gained international prominence were uniformly of Afro-Cuban or even Sino-Cuban descent. This association of sport with Afro-Cuban participation remains today. See: Petalvino, *A Diamond in the Rough*. Though before the Revolution most aristocratic sporting clubs were, de facto, closed to Afro-Cubans, they excelled nonetheless in the most visible forms of physical culture on the island.

his decade's long engagement with Cuban athletics. He joined other lawyers and doctors, along with newspaper publishers like José María Villaverde, who were often at odds with the Cuban government over social policy.⁸⁵⁶ Mena had distinguished himself as a baseball player in 1909, and had since worked alongside Cubillas and San Martín for the legalization and diffusion of boxing on the island. He was an "assiduous devotee" of physical culture and his efforts to engage Cubans with sport purportedly made him worthy of Cuban votes in the upcoming elections for House of Representatives.⁸⁵⁷ His *aficiones*, established him as a proponent of new Cuban manhood, engaged with international sporting trends, an athlete himself, and one who encouraged the vigorous enactment of masculine virtue. The knowledge of this history of boxing, embodied in *El Arte de los Puños* and other popular culture sources became essential for a man who wanted to be fashionable and modern: a "sportman."⁸⁵⁸

For Castellanos Mena, sport in general and boxing in particular were the most modern example of democratic and gender inclusive spaces and practices, reaching across race and class. "Modern" women, he reasoned, were attracted to athletics and in the United States female boxers appeared in public matches; he hoped Cuban women would soon follow suit. That even women loved boxing was proof of its universal appeal. They saw elegant fighters like George Carpentier as he received thunderous applause "greater than kings and emperors," as symbols of sexual powers so prodigious that even Carpentier's wife could not fault other women who threw

⁸⁵⁶ José María Villaverde, the publisher and editor of the newspaper Cuba, allowed a group of Cuban sportmen to build one of the first boxing rings in the patio of the newspaper's headquarters in 1918. Villaverde had been deported to Spain for political agitation in 1911 and had a somewhat checkered legal record. *New York Times*, 21, 22 August 1911.

⁸⁵⁷ Mena won this election and had a lengthy career in Cuban politics where he was known as a social progressive. He was variously known as the "leader of Cuban women," and "defender of the workers." See: Partido Conservador: "Plataforma Electoral para las elecciones de 1932," in Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Colección Cubana, 1932. Cited in Mirta Rosell, *Luchas obreras contra Machado* (La Habana: Editorial Ciencias Sociales, 1973)p. 205.

⁸⁵⁸ See for example: Jacques Montane, "Sport in the World By Way of Great Boxing Championship: The First Days of Boxing," *Carteles*, December, 1921.

themselves at him: “wherever he disembarks the most beautiful women...they have fought over him...for a kiss of that man...even chaste ones, by which they meant only sympathies and admiration for the boxer; even Carpentier’s own wife did not feel by those kisses the dart of jealousy nailed into her heart.”⁸⁵⁹

The powerful and yet cultured masculinity of men like Carpentier, if properly imitated, would make the man knowledgeable and proficient in sport irresistible to women. This was an explicit connection of sport as a metaphor for masculinity to another central signifier of masculine identity: sexual conquest.⁸⁶⁰ Mastery of boxing, in addition to making one a sexual dynamo would also eradicate “shame before foreigners,” another boon to masculine self-confidence, as Cubans would increasingly control and discipline their own bodies, change their national customs, and put away lethal weapons as “cowardly” impediments to the demonstration of virile manhood. Appropriation of modern physical culture, embodied in transnational hero-athletes, would extinguish pernicious social types in Cuba: “it will disappear from our political scene that repugnant type characterized by the fearsome revolver and the pretentious bogeyman bigwig (*cursi coco-macaco*).”⁸⁶¹ Effeminate men were untrained in the deployment of their own physical potential; they relied on weapons to settle disputes, and in the process continued the “hateful” backwardness of Cuban society. The hopeful note, Mena argued, was that Cuban athletes, regardless of their race, boosted national prestige in a competitive transnational

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid., *El Arte de los Puños*.

⁸⁶⁰ Looking to the Caribbean as a whole, sociologist Linden Lewis has argued that the cultures of sport, especially violent pursuits, are intimately connected with concepts of masculinity and sexual power. See: Linden Lewis, *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2003). This current study supports Lewis’ findings, but explores the genesis of these associations in the early twentieth century.

⁸⁶¹ Ibid., *El Arte de los Puños*. Historians of Cuba have not explored small scale political violence, which surfaces often in the popular press of the period. The use of weapons, often “revolvers” to settle disputes over honor in the public sphere would make an interesting case study in political cultures of violence. Most work on violence in politics in Cuba in this period has focused on more organized forms of resistance, like those which culminated in the overthrow of president Machado in the early 1930s. See: Hugh Thomas, *Cuba, or, The Pursuit of Freedom*. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998) and Will Fowler and Peter Lambert, *Political Violence and the Construction of National Identity in Latin America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

environment and hence added to the masculinity and confidence of the nation. The adversaries of this process are represented as effete Cubans who due to ignorance, fear, or adherence to outmoded forms of masculinity disdained the “noble” labor of Cuban sport promoters. Boxers, especially Afro-Cubans, were the owners of “admirable physiques,” they were “crafty and intelligent,” never “lost poise” and they were going a long way to “conquer fame,” for Cuba.⁸⁶² Mena and his ilk wrapped these masculine bodies, literally and figuratively, in the flag.

Cubillas and San Martín claim no literary pretensions, for theirs is a labor of “manliness,” (*varonil*) “relating truths like the Gospel.” They are also concerned with enhancing the social status of their readers: “in times like these, it is good for you to know the details herein, so they don’t think you ignorant in the ways of the ring.” The “they,” in this case are one’s social peers, or those with which the reader supposedly would wish to associate. Knowledge of the history of efforts to popularize physical culture in Cuba then, gives one access to an enviable social position. This knowledge was necessary to avoid social embarrassment through an education on important aspects of Cuban and transnational culture and guides the reader in the proper ways to *show* knowledge associated with the omnipresent Havana sporting scene of the 1920s. Like Raúl Talán’s histories of the Mexican prize ring, *El Arte de los Puños*, is a manual on how to be men in a society where certain types of knowledge can make or break one’s status as a masculine figure.⁸⁶³

Cubillas and San Martín seek to convince their readers that over the previous decade the politicization of physical culture had been an impediment to the progressive strengthening of civil society. The hypocritical and selective granting of licenses to foreign entrepreneurs to hold

⁸⁶² Ibid. “Algo de Boxeo y de Nuestros Boxeadores”

⁸⁶³ See Chapter Three on Raúl Talán.

boxing matches, like the 1915 Jack Johnson bout, and horse races and the prohibitions on Cuban-run sport enterprises had retarded the natural growth of modern sport amid the Cuban populace.⁸⁶⁴ Journalists argued that via their daily consumption of news and trends from outside the island they were uniquely situated to teach Cubans the most modern and effective lessons gleaned from the paradigmatic practices of advanced countries like Great Britain and the United States. The inertia of the state, guided by outmoded ideas, questionable masculinity, and disdain for the capability of native initiative, was an impediment to social evolution.⁸⁶⁵

A defensive tone is taken from the outset: “this book is not to be admired, but to be read and understood.” Echoing the forceful language deployed by Cuban intellectuals like José Sixto de Sola, they posit that Cubans who refuse to accept that physical culture is a positive social force and disdain boxing are close-minded, “short of intelligence and willfully blind.”⁸⁶⁶ The preface is directed to the “Distinguished Sportsmen” of the recently established National Boxing Commission, an influential group of aristocratic Cubans whose continued favor San Martín and Cubillas needed to succeed in the business of boxing. They simultaneously call for the benevolence of the commission while stating that both they and the authors have a common goal: “the regeneration of the manly art of the Marquee of Queensbury in our Republic.” Their arguments are emblematic of Cuban society in transition: while it purports to be a “history,” it is simultaneously a call for the further inclusion and appropriation of these cultural practices into mainstream Cuban society.

The legislative action that led to the foundation of the first regulatory body for boxing and wrestling, the *Comisión Nacional de Boxeo*, was the result of constant pressure emanating

⁸⁶⁴ For further information on selective licensing for American entrepreneurs see Schwarz, *Pleasure Island*.

⁸⁶⁵ As I’ve argued previously, this “democratic” sphere of civil society struggled for existence beyond the political realm. As explicit comparison were made to raceless practices in Cuba not associated with government policy compared to the civil and legislative prohibitions in the United States.

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid. *El Arte de los Puños*.

from Cuban civil society.⁸⁶⁷ Legislators moved to legalize and regulate the popular practice that, despite attempts condemn it, had become an autonomous space in the Cuban public sphere. The government moved to take control and tax it heavily. The new legislation required enormous sums from sport clubs and promoters (5,000 pesos), referees (500), and “managers” (300) that, the legislation suggested, could be obtained from certain finance companies. It also required up to three hundred pesos to issue licenses in the form of cards (*carnets*) to be carried by anyone involved in a boxing match, from timekeepers and club owners, to “seconds” and announcers. In keeping with the idea that boxing was path to social advancement, boxers were only required to pay ten pesos and to prove their “moral condition,” before the Commission.⁸⁶⁸ These cards were to carry their fingerprints, biometrics, biographical information and photographs.⁸⁶⁹ The Commission went on to regulate every aspect of the public spectacle, from the pay given to referees and timekeepers, the amount of free tickets that could be distributed to the press (two per hundred capacity of the arena), how often a boxer could fight, where and when he could fight and the minimum age of a professional boxer: eighteen.⁸⁷⁰

Though the government had yielded in its attempts to outlaw the questionable practice and sought to impose its rule over civil society through blanket regulations, it had no control over the growing public sphere celebration of boxing, as shown by the transnational phenomenon of the Dempsey-Firpo “race war” of 1923.

⁸⁶⁷ ANC: Reglamento de la Comisión Nacional de Boxeo, *Gaceta Oficial*, 19 July 1922, p. 1587. (Hereafter referred to as G.O.)

⁸⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁹ Unfortunately, none of these records remain. They would have been a rich source and social profile for the perhaps thousands of Cubans who registered as professional boxers before the Revolution.

⁸⁷⁰ This regulation of the ages of combatants would be revisited, and lowered, by subsequent decree. This legislation was not the last word of the Cuban government on protecting minors from engaging in or even viewing boxing matches. Subsequent legislation was passed that set the minimum age to view a prizefight at fifteen years old. G.O. de 25 de Julio de 1923, p 13997; See “Legislación social de Cuba” por José R. García Pedroso (1936) tomo I p. 406.

The “Virile and Energetic Reality of our Race”: How Luis Ángel Firpo Embodied the Transnational “Manly Ideal” in Cuba

In the months leading up to the September 1923 heavyweight boxing championship between Argentine Luis Ángel Firpo and American Jack Dempsey, Cuban writers published thousands of words of prose and poetry, pictures and illustrations, predictions and prayers to construct for their readers the importance of the international racial drama unfolding a thousand miles away in New York.⁸⁷¹ Cubans from around the island wrote to newspapers expressing their racial solidarity with the Argentine, some choosing poetry to best express their emotions and citing this as a “historic” moment in the Latin American encounter with global culture. The public sphere, where opinions were voiced and debated sprang into life in the months before the storied bout.

On the evening of September 14, 1923, one newspaper writer estimated that 50,000 Cubans in Havana alone gathered on street corners and in parks to hear the radio broadcast of the bout.⁸⁷² Advertisements for patent medicines seized the popularity of boxing to extol the effects of their product: to make vigorous men capable of surviving in the allegoric struggle for national and racial supremacy. They also promised to remedy the effects of the “mal del siglo”: neurasthenia.⁸⁷³ Racial struggle, the enervating effects of modern life, and the ways to become “virile,” were entangled with this distant and highly theatrical “crisis.” In Argentina, thousands more miles away, the rise of Firpo fomented congressional debates on how best to incorporate boxing into Argentine culture to close the gap between Argentine masculinity and “Anglo

⁸⁷¹ See Chapter 3, account of bout in Mexico.

⁸⁷² *El Mundo*, 15 September 1923.

⁸⁷³ See image from *El Mundo* for “Globetol”

Saxon,” martial prowess.⁸⁷⁴ These same ideas, circulating in Cuba, came to a head as thousands gathered in hope that Firpo, and “Latins” in general, would show their masculine prowess in the New York ring.

Cuban writers, broadcasters, and theater/cinema owners mirrored and enhanced the popular acclaim created by the match by stressing regional identity as the crux in the growing “racial” solidarity with the Argentine boxer not only across Latin America, but with “Latin” countries of Europe. Firpo, Cuban readers learned, was an innocent and powerful exemplar of Latin manhood, a practitioner of the Yankee pastime, and yet possessed a keen business acumen that allowed him to strategically turn his financial windfall into further business opportunities for himself and the Argentine public. In 1923, for example, Firpo, with limited English, negotiated the distributorship for Stutz automobiles for all of Argentina and Uruguay.⁸⁷⁵ His lack of language skills in English, usually cited as a pre-requisite for success in *el Norte*, were overcome by the force of his personality and the notoriety of his profession. Educated and upper-class Latin Americans were no longer the only ones who could compete on the world stage. Firpo, the boxer, was presented as simultaneously *salvaje* (savage) and refined, successfully wielding both violence and commerce as aids in his self-advancement: the Latin self-made man. Around these men and events, Cubans deployed their understanding of the desirable attributes of men in the modern world.

The more dramatic among Cuban commentators petitioned god to assist Firpo in defeating the famous American and his shadowy supporters. Despite laudatory coverage of his

⁸⁷⁴ *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados* (Buenos Aires: Argentina. Congreso de la Nación. Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, Issues 129-205, 1922) p. 271.

⁸⁷⁵ *El Mundo* and *El Diario de la Marina* published pictures of Firpo with the luxurious Stutz automobiles. After his defeat by Dempsey, Firpo returned to Buenos Aires where he displayed two Stutz automobiles at the 6th Annual Automotive Convention in Buenos Aires. *La Nación* (Buenos Aires), 11 November 1923; *El Mundo*, 11 September 1923.

opponent, Jack Dempsey, and the daily reproductions of the images of both athletes as masculine role models and symbols of desire, Cuban sympathies, journalists argued, lay with the Argentine as a “racial brother” and a symbol of “Latin” virility in combat with the hegemonic power to the north.⁸⁷⁶ September 1923 marked the first time that a Latin American challenged a representative of the United States for the designation of “World Heavyweight Champion.” These constructions of Firpo and Dempsey were focal points in the ongoing Cuban imagination of race, identity, and masculinity. The boxers served as archetypal characters, shorthand for larger emergent identities, which represented the aspirations of Cuban writers, and, they argued, large segments of the public, to vicariously excel at the purely modern game of regulated and highly theatrical violence.⁸⁷⁷ The Cuban poets Manuel Giz and José F. de la Peña summed up the significance of the distant event and the sentiments of many writers in their two odes to the Argentine boxer on the eve of the bout:

⁸⁷⁶ As I will argue later in this chapter, the use of images of Firpo and Dempsey in advertising constitutes what Jackson Lears identified in post WWI United States as the increasing use of celebrities to “rouse the inert masses into disciplined enthusiasm” and this periodization holds true for emergent types of desire in the Cuban public. Though there is almost no work on the evolution of advertising as a cultural phenomenon in this era in Latin America; I draw similar conclusions to those of American historians William Leach and Jackson Lears, that the use of sport celebrity figures to sell a range of products designated the “living [of] life on multiple planes of meaning,” where “self and world were melded.” Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1994), p. 151. See also: William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

⁸⁷⁷ Boxers, especially, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were presented to the public not solely as athletes, but often as theatrical figures, earning a great portion of their enormous incomes by appearing on stage. Jack Johnson, James “Jim” Corbett, and John L. Sullivan all traveled extensively with vaudeville troupes. Jack Johnson, by the latter part of his career, identified himself in official documents as an actor or “artist.” See: Kasia Body, *A Cultural History of Boxing*; “Jack Johnson” file at the National Museum of Immigration (Buenos Aires, Argentina). The rise of Latin American boxers, particularly in Mexico, Cuba, and Argentina; was concurrent with the extension of film production to Latin America. Boxers such as Luis Ángel Firpo, Luis Villanueva (Kid Azteca, Mexico), Kid Gavilán (Gerardo González, Cuba) appeared in numerous films from the 1920s-1950s. For details of these films see the Internet Movie Data Base www.imd.com (accessed 12 November 2010).

“To Luis Ángel Firpo”

The ideal laurels of smiling
august victory will crown your head....
demonstrating in the contest that you are
a descendent of this race of invincibles and immortals.

Raise your imperturbable right hand, challenge,
struggling you will win, this is your destiny;
On you is pinned our Latin honor,
most perfect and formidable athlete.

Continue your wrathful , triumphant career.
Hercules, Hispano-American Goliath;
you come from the most warrior-like lineage

That here was able to found a fraternal people.
Thus Cuba, joyful and elevated,
offers her arm, and squeezes your hand.⁸⁷⁸

“The Victor”

Shining star on which a Race fixes
Its honor and hope:
Inspired by faith in his strength.
Without concern for whom destiny may chose!
.....

Remember that this is the “chance” of your life
to acquire unimaginable glory
Offering to your race what it loves.⁸⁷⁹

Far from professional writers, Manuel Giz, José de la Peña, and other amateur poets wrote these lines to express their solidarity with a man they had never met but who they felt furthered the standing of their race in the eyes of the world. Cubans, in the poem, are characterized as part of a regionally and racially defined group that appropriates Firpo as one of their own. Race, according to Giz and De la Peña, should be experienced in this historical

⁸⁷⁸Manuel Giz, “To Luis Ángel Firpo,” in *Diario de la Marina*, 1 September 1923

⁸⁷⁹José F. de la Peña, “The Victor,” in *El Mundo*, 28 August 1923.

context as a pan-Latin American constant formed by common Spanish racial heritage and history (excluding indigenous or Afro-descended Latin Americans). Firpo served as a transitional figure in the contemporary Cuban imagination of race and sport. Imagined as a racially pure Argentine of European stock, he was the first Latin American in long line of increasingly darker-skinned athletic idols that came to represent regional and national celebrations of vigorous manhood. Many editorials published in the weeks leading up to the bout focused on Firpo's mixed, yet completely "Latin" Italian and Spanish heritage.⁸⁸⁰ Others claimed that he was born of an Argentine woman (of Spanish heritage) and an Italian immigrant father. Amid these different formulations of Firpo's race, the honor of Latin America manhood as a whole is "pinned" on the boxer as a "perfect" athlete and representative of the variously defined "Hispanic-American," "Indo-American," or "Latin American" race. Racial combat, by proxy, is embedded in the voluminous linguistic constructions of the bout.

Firpo's ancestry, traced by some contemporary commentators to the mountains of Spain, by others to the medieval castles of Italy, is of secondary importance compared to the manner in which his race was conceived by those who attached their own high hopes to his ascent in the field of competitive, transnational athletics. In defining Firpo, the deployment of racial ideas is sometimes confused and confusing, often fluid and contingent upon context and motive. Official representatives of the Argentine, Italian, and Spanish governments voiced their support of him and appropriated his image as emblematic of the most masculine and modern characteristics of their respective peoples. His popularity even stimulated Latin Americans in the United States to show their solidarity with the boxer through popular subscription toward the purchase of an honorific medal and ceremonial pair of boxing gloves that were awarded him in a

⁸⁸⁰ "Tratemos de Algo..." *Diario de la Marina*, 11 September 1923.

public ceremony.⁸⁸¹ Hundreds of Cubans traveled to New York to witness the bout, investing weeks and sometimes hundreds of dollars in bets, travel fare and lodging fees.⁸⁸²

Though the American Jack Dempsey refused to risk his title to deserving boxers of African-American descent; he gladly accepted the Argentine, though a foreigner, as less of a risk to the white races' maintenance of the title.⁸⁸³ Cubans were keenly aware of the racial injustice perpetrated by American athletes who refused to give African-Americans their due chance; but they reveled in the knowledge that a "Latin," might become champion.

Though Firpo as a racial representative was imagined by a number of different commentators across Latin America, an intellectual counterpoint disdained the location of Latin honor in such a disreputable and barbaric (and ultimately unsuccessful) pursuit; these divergent opinions will be addressed shortly. Giz's poem, in its celebration of pan-Latin identity, however, is reminiscent of the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío's well known poetic confrontation of American hemispheric hegemony "To Roosevelt (1904)," in which "Spanish America" is

⁸⁸¹ See Chapter 4 for an account of this meeting of the Spanish Beneficent Society of New York in which Luis Ángel Firpo was awarded these tokens of admiration. *El Mundo*, 11 September 1923.

⁸⁸² *El Mundo*, 12 and 17 September 1923.

⁸⁸³ Social reformers in the United States, were not so accepting of Firpo as "white." Along with the African-American boxer Jack Johnson, he was brought up on charges for violating the Mann Act, which prohibited the transport of white women across state lines for immoral purposes. This law was designed specifically with men like Jack Johnson in mind and its application to white men was extremely rare. Paradoxically, charges were brought in federal court by the former President of the New York Civic League, Canon William Sheafe Chase, against Firpo for violating the racist Mann Act and sought to stop his 1924 match with the African-American contender Harry Wills. The attempt was quashed by federal court judge William Runyan, citing the misuse of federal statutes in an attempt to circumvent the law of New Jersey, where the fight was scheduled to take place. "Warrant for Firpo Denied as Artifice," *New York Times*, 12 September 1924; "Reformers Now Seek Mann Act Warrant for Wayward Firpo," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 11 September 1924. Paul Sann, *The Lawless Decade; A Pictorial History of a Great American Transition: from the World War I Armistice and Prohibition to Repeal and the New Deal* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1957); Sheafe Chase was a vociferous moralist and foe of most any manifestation of popular culture that he deemed immoral. For example, see: Donald Crafton and Charles Harpole, *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926 – 1931* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1999).

characterized as “cubs of the Spanish Lion” in competition with the expansionist aims of an alien and incompatible culture⁸⁸⁴ Firpo, Giz argued, was that Latin American identity incarnate.



Figure 14: Luis Ángel Firpo at the Argentine Embassy, Washington D.C. (Library of Congress)

⁸⁸⁴ For a discussion of Darío’s pan-Latin Americanism and anti-Americanism see: Alberto Acereda and Rigoberto Guevara, *Modernism, Rubén Darío, and the Poetics of Despair* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004). In this celebrated work, Darío locates the United States’ character and imperialist aims in Theodore Roosevelt as “the future invader of Latin America.” In opposition to Anglo-Saxon North Americans, Darío posits a Pan-Latin American identity based on Hispanic racial inheritance and the history of Spain as an imperial counterweight to Rooseveltian expansionism.



Figure 15: “Firpo Prepares for the World Championship,” *El Mundo*, 31 August 1923

By the time of the Dempsey-Firpo match in 1923, the relationship between race, sport, and wider identities were public sphere topics in Cuba.⁸⁸⁵ It is clear, that as in the United States, many Latin American observers subscribed to the idea that success in competitive sport was a badge of achievement that indicated the vigorous masculinity espoused by many proponents of manliness in the United States, most famous among them Theodore Roosevelt.⁸⁸⁶ Various

⁸⁸⁵“El Verdadero Valor de los boxeadores de color” Carteles, May 1922. As early as 1908, Cuban writers had written on the superb talents of Afro-Cuban baseball players, singling them out based on their race.

⁸⁸⁶ For Roosevelt’s arguments of the value of “strenuous” living see: Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (New York: Century, 1904). There is an enormous historiography on the early-twentieth century associations with sport, masculinity, and civilization; particularly in the context of preventing perceived effeminacy and countering the effects of stifling urban decadence. This impulse towards the cultivation of violent, vigorous, and ostentatious masculinity has been argued by many historians as a prime factor in American imperialist aims toward the beginning of the twentieth-century. See: Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization* (Chicago:

American gender historians, among them Gail Bederman and Kristin Hoganson, have argued that the importance placed by middle and upper class Americans on displaying manhood through athletics in this period was largely due to fears of the decadent forces of inertia and effeminacy that were a constant danger to the vitality and power of American men and, by extension, the nation as a whole.⁸⁸⁷ This study helps uncover the implementation of these transnational ideas in Cuba through the elevation of boxing and the public emphasis placed on the development of “physical culture” that raised it to the status of patriotic endeavor. Beyond the success of individual racial and national groups in combating the dangers of urban life, victory in boxing was portrayed as a border crossing “democratic” field where individual and racial merit were decided both fairly and dramatically. Cuban commentators presented transnational athletic events to their readers in these terms, strikingly similar to those used in the United States, and made explicit comparisons of events in distant New York with the rapid development of the cultural system in which boxing flourished on the island.⁸⁸⁸

Imbedded in the language and symbolism of boxing, Cuban unease with “evil of the century,” “neurasthenia” was expressed in terms of solutions to the enervating effects of modern urban life. Neurasthenia was a condition of weakness, effeminacy, and lack of decisiveness

University of Chicago Press, 1995); Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). David A. Gerstner, *Manly Arts: Masculinity and Nation in Early American Cinema* (Durham: Duke Univ. Pr, 2006). There is virtually no historiographical treatment of the connections between American and Latin American conceptions of masculinity in this period. This study, I hope, begins to close this gap in understanding the transnational flow of ideas and their implementations in Latin America.

⁸⁸⁷ Roosevelt, for example, took boxing lessons in the White House and cited boxing as an “ideal” means to recover lost or endangered masculinity attributed to city life. See: H. W. Brands *The Reckless Decade: America in the 1890s* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 292; Valeria Tinkler-Villani, *Babylon or New Jerusalem?: Perceptions of the City in Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), p. 209; and Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, Chapter 5: “Theodore Roosevelt: Manhood, Nation, and ‘Civilization.’” and Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁸⁸⁸ The Cuban response to arguments of their effeminacy that was attribute to the dissimilarities in public sphere culture and racial came early in the period. For one example see: Mariano Benítez Veguillas, *Cuba ante la historia y el sentido común* (Habana: Imprenta “El Figaro”, 1897).

that was attributed to the loss of primal energies associated with healthy, rural living.⁸⁸⁹ Cuban intellectuals imported this idea to apply it to the Cuban condition that, they feared, was increasingly common and detrimental to the national body.⁸⁹⁰ These same ideas appeared, with increasing frequency, into the 1920's.⁸⁹¹ One locus for the transfer of these intellectual ideas into public life was through newspapers and the advertisements for products to reverse this dreaded condition. Transnational advertisements for patent medicines, some appearing in newspapers all over Latin America, promised regeneration and strengthening of the primal instincts of man through a combination of medication and affinity for virile sports like boxing (See Figure 4 in this Chapter and Figure 3 in Chapter 4).

⁸⁸⁹ For an account of the widespread fears embodied in the condition of neurasthenia in the United States in this same period see: Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010).

⁸⁹⁰ Cuban observers celebrated the reorientation of public education toward physical culture, in which “especially the boys” were showing modern tastes by their interest in “muscular exercises” like baseball and other sports. These advances were attributed to respect for personal hygiene and the desire to compete with others. This same report criticizes the “feminizing tendency” in Cuban public education in general and suggests that more virility be instilled in Cuban youths to counter the “romantic and idealizing spirit.” See: Eduardo de la Vega, “Superintendencia de escuelas” in *La instrucción primaria: Revista quincenal*, Volumen 4 (1906) (Cuba. Secretaría de Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes), pp. 385-88.

⁸⁹¹ Among many examples, see: Alejandro Andrade Coello, “El Ecuador Intelectual” in *Cuba Contemporanea* (Vol. 12, 1916), pp. 179-191. In the *municipio* of Remedios, outside of Havana, neurasthenia was blamed even as a cause of death by renowned physician Dr. Carlos Finlay: Cuba. *Informe, mensual sanitario y demográfico de la República de Cuba*. 1903.



Advertisement for “Globéol,” *El Mundo*, 21 September 1923.

Indeed, boxing had taken root quickly in Cuba and writers looked abroad, claiming intimate knowledge of the world of sport outside of Cuba to settle contentious domestic debates.⁸⁹² For example, on the same day as the publication of Giz’s ode, Cubans learned that a local boxer, Eladio “Black Bill” Valdés, had returned to Havana from Key West, Florida to hold a boxing match. The motive for this change in the location of the bout was reportedly because the authorities in that southern island town had moved to prevent Black Bill from engaging in a bout with the white Kid Shakey [sic] because interracial matches were prohibited by local decree.⁸⁹³ No such law existed in Cuba. Simultaneously, Cuban writers reported that the gifted African-American heavyweight, the “candidate of the colored race,” would never be allowed to fight for Jack Dempsey’s title.⁸⁹⁴ Young Sam McVea, an African-American boxer from New

⁸⁹² In a letter published in *El Mundo*, 28 August 1923, journalist and promoter Samuel “Sam” Tolón rebukes Joe Massaguer and the American owner of the Havana Hotel “Royal Palm” (where many foreign boxers visiting Havana were lodged) one Mr. Todgham, for being mistaken on a minor point about Canadian boxing. Knowledge, grudges, and embarrassment were key ingredients in the Cuban desires surrounding boxing.

⁸⁹³ *Diario de la Marina*, 1 September 1923.

⁸⁹⁴ “Wills No Podra Nunca Disputar a Firpo El Titulo Mundial,” *Diario de la Marina*, 7 September 1923; “Harry Wills Dice Que El Argentino No Ataja a Nadie,” *El Mundo*, 24 September 1923.

Orleans arrived after a barnstorming tour of Jamaica and Panama bearing newspaper clippings to prove his success in the ring and his bona fides as a challenger. He praised Cuban racial tolerance where “boxers of the colored race can fight with white fighters and win the money they deserve.”⁸⁹⁵ Cubans journalists reproduced detailed accounts of the legal battles of the African-American boxer Harry Wills for a chance to meet the Champion Jack Dempsey in the ring. Race alone, Cuban readers were informed over and over again, was the only factor that prevented Wills the fruits of his long career.⁸⁹⁶ Once again, Cubans celebrated the civic nationalism that, social commentators stressed, was more democratic than that of the United States and decried racial segregation that limited the upward mobility for Cubans of African descent.⁸⁹⁷ The great American champion, in risking his title to a member of the Latin race, would continue to deny his African-American countryman a shot at the heavyweight crown.

In the weeks leading up to Dempsey-Firpo, *habaneros* attended a variety of boxing matches in virtually all parts of the city. In the beach suburb of Marianao, entrepreneurs held “Battle Royale” boxing matches in conjunction with social outings to the beach where Cubans were invited to take part in such traditional games “played by [their] ancestors” as catching a greased duck.⁸⁹⁸ These entertainments were augmented by prize fights in a ring erected on the beach where “all those who feel themselves to be manly” were encouraged to mount the ring where no limits on “weight, age, or [skin] color” were established to segregate Cubans in the

⁸⁹⁵ *El Mundo*, 22 and 23 August 1923.

⁸⁹⁶ “El Manager de Harry Wills Trata de Impedir la Pelea Desmpsey-Firpo,” 6 September 1923, *El Mundo*, “Dempsey Dice que Jamas le Dara un Chance a H. Wills,” *El Mundo*, 7 September 1923.

⁸⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹⁸ “Battle Royale’s” were introduced as a form of entertainment by American promoters in 1915. As an American pastime, these matches were generally limited to African-Americans and Afro-Cubans. It was seen as beneath the dignity of white fighters to enter into these contests which were represented as highly comical performances where blind folded blacks fought to the last man standing amid the laughter of whites. See Chapter Two for more on the introduction of Battle Royales. *El Mundo*, 29 August 1923, 31 August 1923; *El Diario de la Marina*, 29 August 1923.

manner that was common practice in the rings of the north.⁸⁹⁹ The promoters of these events portrayed this type of entertainment as a quintessentially Cuban form of recreation and relaxation: “you will have an agreeable day in the open air, swimming, listening to music, dancing, watching boxing [matches], walking on the beach.it will take away your bad mood and the worries of business.”⁹⁰⁰ Watching men pummel each other in the ring was as Cuban as dancing and walking on the beach. The social seat of aristocratic *habanero* society, the Cuba Lawn Tennis club, opened its facilities for the amateur boxing championship where a cross-racial group of dozens of young men from the Y.M.C.A., Regla, Police, Customs Agent’s, Sporting, Clerk’s, and La Salle athletic club competing for honorary titles .⁹⁰¹

In the suburbs and in the working class heart of the city Cubans attended, bet scarce pesos on, and were entertained by prizefighting. In the professional and amateur stadiums of Central Havana boxers from the furthest reaches of the island fought in front of crowds of Cuban sportsmen. Afro-Cuban professionals from Cienfuegos (Gustavo Galo “Sparring” Caballero) Cárdenas (Kid Cárdenas), and Sagua la Grande (Ramón “Releaux Saguero” Cabrera) joined white Cubans like Enrique “The Topaz of Cienfuegos” Ponce de León and other Latin Americans like the Uruguayan Juan Carlos Casala to compete for increasingly lucrative purses. They engaged in highly publicized grudge matches, published defaming letters in the press, and engaged in theatrical behavior to boost revenues.⁹⁰² Local businesses backed fighters like Antonio Valdes “the Creole marvel” and “Pride of the Harris Brothers.”⁹⁰³ Juan Garzón squared off against the “Cuban [George] Carpentier.” A police escort led Ponce de Leon to the ring, not

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁹⁰¹“Boxeo Amateur” *El Mundo*, 22 August 1923, “Union Atletico de Amateurs,” 3 September 1923.

⁹⁰²Massaquer, “Topicos de *El Día*,” *El Mundo*, 28 August 1923.

⁹⁰³Harris Brothers was one of the first department stores in Cuba. It still exists (2010) as a store for tourist and Cubans with access to outside currency.

under arrest but to pay homage to him as the boxing trainer for the Third Police Station gym.

Customs agent Alberto Dumois represented his fellow workers in a match held in the Stadium of the Marina. An amateur tournament took place “to foment the sport of boxing in Cuba as one of the means of physical and moral betterment for Cuban youths.”⁹⁰⁴ All of these events took place in the first weeks of September in 1923.

These local matches were juxtaposed to the transnational event of the prizefight between Firpo and Dempsey. Accounts of the bout dominated the presentation of news from abroad in Havana newspapers for weeks surrounding the match and men were challenged “to show their manliness” by taking part in boxing matches.⁹⁰⁵ “Experts,” both Cuban and foreign, predicted the outcome of the racialized battle between north and south in lengthy diatribes in the Havana press. Former champions Jim Corbett and Jess Willard and the African-American heavyweight Harry Will’s opinions’ were published in lengthy articles translated into Spanish for Cuban readers.⁹⁰⁶ When the day of the fight finally arrived, it had been dissected, predicted, argued, and justified in public discourse by dozens of individuals from countries on every inhabited continent.

A Havana law student, José Luis Sandoval, boarded a steamship bound for New York in order to witness the match between “the colossus of the Anglo Saxon race and that of the Latin.” Presented as the paragon of Cuban youth, Sandoval had proven his worth by having a thorough

⁹⁰⁴“Convocation of the Amateur Boxing Championship of Cuba,” *Diario de la Marina*, 2 September 1923. This renaming of individuals to mirror former celebrities like Carpentier was accompanied by picture of the French boxer as fashion idol and ladies’ man, 3 September 1923, *El Mundo*.

⁹⁰⁵Havana newspapers like *El Mundo*, *El Diario de la Marina*, and *Heraldo de Cuba* contracted well-known American sportswriters like Damon Runyon, Grantland Rice, and Bob Edgren to give their opinions on the bout. Under titles like “El Argentino es Bobo, pero bobo como una zorra (The Argentine is dumb, but dumb like a fox) by Grantland Rice, Cuban readers learned of the admiration of some Americans for Firpo’s cunning and intelligence. *El Mundo*, 28 August 1923.

⁹⁰⁶*El Diario de la Marina*, 8 September 1923.

grasp on prizefighting.⁹⁰⁷ Hundreds of Cubans, *El Mundo* reported, had “invaded New York,” traveling on trains and steamships to witness the bout, among them the son in law of the President and the son-in-law of the President, Celso Cuellar del Rio and his family.⁹⁰⁸ Joe Massaguer, writing an account of one such voyage on the Governor Cobb steamship, suggested they rename the ship the “Dempsey-Firpo Special,” as ninety percent of the passengers were headed to New York to witness the bout.⁹⁰⁹ To represent the “Firpista Party,” one Sr. Martín took it upon himself to purchase a ringside seat and travel to New York.⁹¹⁰ Guillermo Pi, writing for *El Diario de la Marina*, informed his readers of the daily events taking place in the training camps of the two boxers, calling on Cubans to imagine urban and rural scenes in the United States where preparations were taking place. Even the training camps, José “Joe” Massaguer explained to his readers, were cosmopolitan sites; in Firpo’s alone one could hear conversations in Italian, Spanish, German, English, and French.⁹¹¹ Italian and Argentine laborers, one Cuban wrote, avoided work in New York City in order to watch Firpo hit the punching bag and skip rope.⁹¹² The Cuban Boxing Commission, juxtaposing itself to the New York Boxing Commission (a regulatory committee that set rules, managed bouts and established the eligibility of fighters and managers), published its weekly proceedings for public consumption and transparency. Boxers, promoters, trainers, ring doctors, and seconds were listed by name and their assigned license number; reasons were given for denying certain fighters eligibility to enter

⁹⁰⁷“Un firpista más (Another Firpo Supporter),” *El Diario de la Marina*, 6 September 1923.

⁹⁰⁸E.N. Robaina “Un gran número de cubanos ha invadido la ciudad de N. York,” *El Mundo*, 13 September 1923.

⁹⁰⁹Joe Massaguer, “Topicos de *El Día*,” 12 September 1923.

⁹¹⁰Joe Massaguer, “Topicos de *El Día*” 7 September 1923.

⁹¹¹“Joe” Massaguer, “Topicos de *El Día*,” *El Mundo*, 25 August 1923. Joe Massaguer was the consummate Cuban cosmopolitan and “sportsman,” he served as sport editor for both the Havana Post and *El Mundo*. He was also an accomplished caricaturist who drew these satirical cartoons to mock Cuban high society and politicians in the revista *Social*. He covered the Firpo-Dempsey match in special wire-dispatches from New York. See: Roberto González Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana: A History of Cuban Baseball* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), p. 151. Massaguer would later accompany Kid Chocolate on many trips abroad.

⁹¹²*Diario de la Marina*, 10 September 1923.

the ring. One boxer, Ponce de León, was prevented from engaging in a bout because the Cuban Boxing Commission's doctors, after a thorough examination, deemed him physically unfit to fight. This type of bureaucratic ostentation mirrored that of the sister Commission in the United States.⁹¹³

Firpo, to the joy of Cuban observers, received foreign dignitaries in his training camp outside of New York, such as the Italian consul who presented him with a coat of arms from his mother's Italian-descended family, assuring him that his ancestors were warriors and conquerors, "soldiers of Christ," and that the "race was admirably incarnated in him."⁹¹⁴ Firpo carried great responsibility on his shoulders: "A tree that has these roots-- that has been fed from generation to generation with such powerful sap, can only continue the tradition. He is obligated to do it."⁹¹⁵ He was, a Cuban journalist proclaimed "the Latin hope (*la esperanza latina*)."⁹¹⁶

José "Joe" Massaguer, the cosmopolitan sports editor for the Havana newspaper *EL Mundo*, reacted to the voluminous mail he received about the bout from even the smallest towns on the island. He opened a section of the newspaper to publish these letters that expressed the hopes that Cuban placed in the victory of the Argentine.⁹¹⁷ One Antolín Gómez, from Cárdenas, wrote that his "heart [was] with Firpo. Gómez proclaimed that he was a "100% boxing fan" and that he devoured the daily press about the sport that he received in his provincial town. Firpo, he reasoned, was in "perfect physical condition" and embodied the "Greatest of Latin Hopes." His intellect told him, however, that Dempsey stood a better chance to win.⁹¹⁸ Rolando Casas, writing from Matanzas, expressed his hopes in messianic terms: Firpo, for Casas was "a figure

⁹¹³ Ibid.

⁹¹⁴ Ibid., 11 September 1923.

⁹¹⁵ Ibid.

⁹¹⁶ Ibid.

⁹¹⁷ *El Mundo*, 3 September 1923.

⁹¹⁸ *El Mundo*, 13 September 1923.

who will defeat the Saxon race once and for all, a figure to represent the Latin Race, [who] will know how to carry proudly the paladin of Championship of the World.”⁹¹⁹ Furthermore, he flattered the editor, Massaguer, for his genius in giving common Cubans a platform from which to express their racial solidarity.⁹²⁰

Several Cubans agreed with Casas, that the fight was to decide more than just supremacy in the boxing ring. Trying to avoid the “latin passion” of other writers, Ricardo de la Torre wrote that he believed that brute force always wins, and since Firpo was brutishness incarnate, he would certainly prevail.⁹²¹ One writer, who identified himself only as S.Q, differed from most: He reasoned that thousands of people awaited with true anxiety the result of the fight... what some have called a “Pelea de Raza,” not for the discussion of supremacy in boxing, but the supremacy of the Saxon race over the Latin, or vice versa.

“It is an absurd danger to see in Firpo or Dempsey the representative of a race, races should never be represented by brute force, but in how advanced they are in Art, Science, Industry, etc. In our century, the force of intellect is more important, and Desmpesy and Firpo have little of that.... We, as Latins, should hope for the triumph of Firpo, but, we should not blind ourselves and hope for the defeat of the world champion.”⁹²²

It was true that the Argentine had a good “chance,” but “Dempsey [had] better science though, and Firpo was already morally defeated because he wanted more time to learn before the fight.”

Aurelio Baldoz, writing from Havana, appointed himself to speak for many on the pettiness of Americans in regard to fair competition: “We all know that the Americans cannot tolerate a Latin besting them in anything, much less will they look kindly upon the world’s

⁹¹⁹ Ibid.

⁹²⁰ Ibid.

⁹²¹ “Un Firpista ‘verdá’” *El Mundo*, 5 September 1923.

⁹²² Ibid.

crown passing to the Latin race...”⁹²³ Arroyo Ruz, also writing from Havana, deprecated those Cubans who he saw as traitors to national identity. Those who hoped Dempsey would win did so because they had “spent their month” in the United States and because of this experience fancied themselves “Franks” instead of “Franciscos.” They deluded themselves into thinking that they had a connection with the American champion.⁹²⁴ R.G. Tilla concurred, but also impugned Cubans for talking out of turn about an “art” that they knew little about. It made Cubans look ridiculous, as would an American who pretended knowledge that was not a product of his culture:

The immense majority of those of us who speak about Firpo and Dempsey are not authorized to do so... Either we don’t know the first word on boxing, or because we don’t know the current conditions of the boxers. Some of us think that because we have seen ten or twelve bad local fights we know what boxing is, and the truth is that whichever authentic Frank or Peter, not these false ones that Senor Arroyo alluded to, know possibly more than whichever or us about the art that currently enriches Firpo, the powerful Argentine, and the reason is very simple, perhaps presenting the opposite would be more clear: ‘Can you all imagine the ridiculous role Mr. Runyan, the great North American chronicler would play, writing about a cock fight?’⁹²⁵

J. Martínez shared the admiration that many felt for Dempsey as an emblematic physical specimen, dozens of Cuban men voiced similar opinions: “Dempsey is one of the most perfect human examples that exists, all of his body is in proper proportion...” Despite this, Firpo was still the best Latin hope.⁹²⁶ Ramos Izquierdo writing from an unknown location in Cuba, called upon his experience living in the United States immediately after Cuban Independence and his “Twenty Years” as an assiduous boxing fan to reason that Firpo, without doubt, would win.⁹²⁷ It

⁹²³ Ibid.

⁹²⁴ *El Mundo*, 3 September 1923.

⁹²⁵ *El Mundo*, 6 September 1923.

⁹²⁶ Ibid.

⁹²⁷ *El Mundo*, 12 September 1923.

was not a question of races for Izquierdo, but Firpo being hungry and the champion being worn out.⁹²⁸

Rafael Román from his home in remote rural town of San José de los Ramos (pop. 8,000) supported his idea that Dempsey would win through “reading the opinions of sport critics the world over.”⁹²⁹ Even in farming communities, the distant events in New York fascinated readers who felt themselves integral parts of a battle for racial supremacy on the small stage. From Guanajay, in Havana province, one J.R.H. worked out mathematical equations contingent on his measurement of the comparative endurance, strength, and “chins,” of Firpo and Dempsey, to conclude with “scientific certainty,” that Firpo would triumph.⁹³⁰ On the day of the bout, amid a flurry of letters stating carefully reasoned predictions and bold hopes, one man expressed his determination to “pawn” his underwear, pants, and even his wife in order to bet on Firpo’s victory.⁹³¹

The widespread engagement of public opinion, as expressed in these dozens of letters, reveals the importance of vicarious identification and the power of received ideas about manhood and identity, even in the remotest corners of Cuba. The sometimes bizarre arguments may strike some modern readers as false consciousness or as naïve attachment to a novel and manipulative transnational money making machine; but it is obvious that heartfelt emotion and racial pride and were at stake for these Cubans. Knowledge, the consumption of transnational information, was the key factor in most of these letters as they explained their *bona fides* as arm-chair critics and *sportmen*. Given the recent history of American military and economic

⁹²⁸ Ibid.

⁹²⁹ *El Mundo*, 13 September 1923. Cuba and Ángel C. Betancourt y Miranda, *Census of the Republic of Cuba 1919*. (Havana: Maza, Arroyo y Caso Printers, 1920). *Bulletin of the United States Geographical Survey*, No. 192 (1902).

⁹³⁰ Ibid.

⁹³¹ *El Mundo*, 14 September 1923.

domination of Cuba as explained in Chapter Two, this fervent admiration and hope placed in Firpo as a representative Latin and Cuban and as a challenger to American cultural dominance is understandable.

In the city of Havana, owning a radio in these early days of broadcasting was a symbol of social status and wealth.⁹³² The evening of the bout, however, individuals, soap factories, mattress companies, theaters and “radio clubs,” shared their prized possessions with the masses of Cubans who gathered in parks, on street corners, and in front of hotels to hear the live broadcast of the fight.⁹³³ For many Cubans, this was probably the first radio transmission they had ever heard. Afro-Cubans, Euro-Cubans, men, women, and children gathered to listen to the bout: an estimated 50,000 men and women in the city of Havana alone. Little else in this period had such a powerful hold over the public imagination. For one radio enthusiast, such excitement showed “the culture of our people.”⁹³⁴

Dempsey’s second round knockout of Firpo was taken in stride by most Cuban writers in the immediate aftermath of the fight. They took pride away from Firpo’s courageous attempt and called it a “moral victory” for Latin America.⁹³⁵ There were a number of people to blame, but the Wild Bull of the Pampas was not one of them. Most newspapers in the United States fulminated against the victor, Jack Dempsey, for repeatedly fouling Firpo while the referee stood by and did nothing. The hundreds of Latin Americans that attended the fight increased their dedication to the Argentine and held high hopes for his future.

⁹³²Oscar Luis López, *La radio en Cuba: estudio de su desarrollo en la sociedad neocolonial* (Ciudad de la Habana, Cuba: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1981).

⁹³³*El Mundo*’s radio editor stopped counting the locations where these radios were placed in public at twenty, but he estimated the perhaps twice that amount would be deployed. *El Mundo*, 14 September 1923.

⁹³⁴“Radiotelefonía,” *El Diario de la Marina*, 12 September 1923. Pictures published the following day in *El Mundo* show four locations where a racial, gender, and age mix of people excitedly listened to the match.

⁹³⁵ *Ibid.*

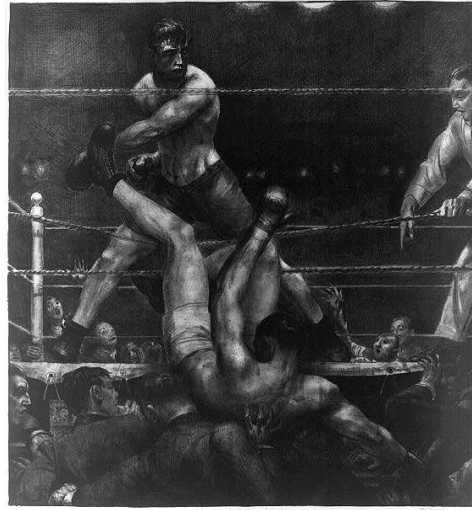


Figure 16: **“Firpo Through the Ropes”** Luis Ángel Firpo knocks Jack Dempsey through the ropes. George Bellows. (Library of Congress)



Figure 17: Advertisement for “Greco” Vermouth, *Diario de la Marina*, 6 September 1923

Cubans reveled in the new technologies and *aficiones* that marked them as a cultured, virile, and modern people. They utilized the public sphere, where they wrote passionate defenses of their “racial” preferences in a far away bout that, in actuality, determined little about their daily lives. Nowhere was the public sphere more highly visible than in the Cuban appropriation of transnational sport to express themselves and their place amid transnational cultures. Before

the close of the decade, Cuban boxers had reached those heights of celebrity that before had been reserved for foreigners.

Kid Chocolate, The Communists, and the Rise of An Afro-Cuban Celebrity

In August of 1929, the Afro-Cuban boxer Kid Chocolate defeated the Jewish-American Al Singer in front of 50,000 fans at the Polo Grounds in New York.⁹³⁶ In Havana, the Cuban public gathered in the streets, in front of newspaper offices, in cafes, and in bars to listen to the blow-by-blow radio broadcast of the bout. Amateur radio stations set up their receivers on street corners to cater to the enormous public excitement over the match. Chocolate, as he was affectionately if belittlingly known, was transformed into a popular culture hero in Cuba, particularly for Afro-Cubans. He was sought after to appear in advertisements for local champagne and beer companies being paraded by white factory owners, his autograph published alongside their ads as they tried to benefit from his enormous, cross-class popularity.⁹³⁷ In the months following his return, he toured the island with his entourage and the film of his bout in tow to show in local theaters. In Camaguey, the mayor celebrated a special session of the town council to publically celebrate the boxer as among those patriots who had “put the Cuban flag on high.”⁹³⁸ In Havana, clothing stores in the most elite shopping center, the *Manzana de Gómez*

⁹³⁶ The racial/ethnic overtones of the fight generated dramatic media coverage that played on ethnic stereotypes. One writer expressed the victory of the Afro-Cuban over the Jewish American in comedic terms “without even being Arab, Kid Chocolate imposed a terrible punishment on the Hebrew...” *La gran estregia de Pincho fue factor principal en el triunfo de Kid Chocoalte,* *El Diario de la Marina*, 7 September 1929.

⁹³⁷ “Kid Chocolate en Guanabacoa,” *El Diario de la Marina*, 30 September 1929.

⁹³⁸ “Recibe y Agasaja el Ayuntamiento Camagueyano a ‘Kid’ Chocolate y su manager Pincho Gutierrez” (The Town Hall of Camaguey receives and entertains Kid Chocolate and his manager Pincho Gutierrez,” *El Diario de la Marina*, 29 September 1929, p. 21.; *El Diario de la Marina*, 12 September 1929.

located on Central Park, passed out handbills with the “Kid’s” picture to advertise their expensive suits.⁹³⁹

El Diario de la Marina’s special correspondent, who traveled with the boxer and sent almost daily cables to apprise the Cuban public of his every move, attributed the victory to the union of white Cuban intelligence in the form of manager Luis “Pincho” Gutiérrez, and Afro-Cuban athletic ability in the body of Kid Chocolate.⁹⁴⁰ The white manager’s strategy, the correspondent argued, had proven to be the decisive factor in the fighter’s victory; a Cuban manager had out-thought the American experts. Cuba, in the form of the 125 lb. Afro-Cuban boxer had defeated the hero of Jewish America.⁹⁴¹ In this case, the triumph over the North, was dramatic and complete. Intelligence and wit on the part of Gutiérrez had guided his Afro-Cuban “Bon Bon” to victory.⁹⁴²

⁹³⁹ Advertisement for “El Sol: Trajes,” circa 1929. Collection of the author.

⁹⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁹⁴¹ Ibid.

⁹⁴² The Cuban Bon-Bon, was how Chocolate was often referred to in the United States.



Figure 18: Kid Chocolate, 7 September 1929

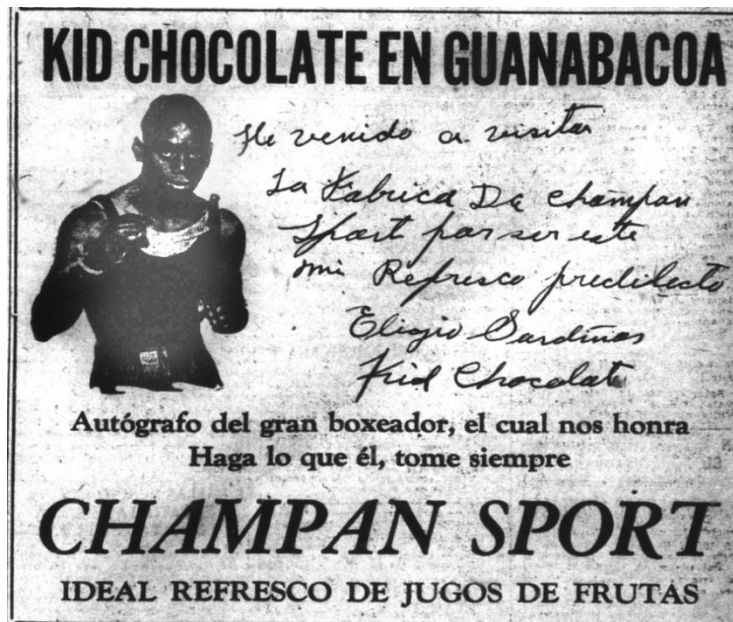


Figure 19: Kid Chocolate advertises "Champán Sport"

The boxer's triumphant return to Havana a week later was one of the most anticipated public events in recent memory.⁹⁴³ After a tumultuous reception by the Cuban consul and enormous crowds of Cuban-Americans and African-Americans in Miami, Chocolate and his manager "Pincho" landed in Havana harbor on September 8th, on a special hydroplane, to the music of the municipal band, thousands of *fanaticos* lining the shores, and nearly every boat in the harbor packed with people waiting for a glimpse of the small dark-skinned boxer from the shanty-town of Cerro, on the margins of Havana.⁹⁴⁴ Reporters gushed over Chocolate's fame: the *negrito* in addition to being a "perfect" boxer, had a friendly smile and was an "ebony statue, perfectly symmetrical and exquisitely modeled."⁹⁴⁵ He was hailed as the "chosen son" of Cuba.⁹⁴⁶

From the lighthouse tower of the sixteenth century fort *El Morro*, constructed by slave labor, the signal to close the Havana harbor was given as the hydroplane approached from the north. The thousands of spectators stumbled over themselves, causing numerous injuries and nearly sinking one of the harbor's docks.⁹⁴⁷ The entire *malecón* was filled with people as the special car sent by the mayor's office drove the boxer and his manager to the town hall, where Kid Chocolate's mother and girlfriend waited with the mayor. Several individuals spoke in dramatic nationalist terms about the valor, patriotism, and national honor that were all now intricately connected with the boxer's triumph in New York. Comandante Enrique Recio compared Chocolate, the "Bronze Hero," with General Antonio Maceo, the "Bronze Titan"

⁹⁴³ "The reception of Kid Chocolate exceeded even what had been expected: Kid Chocolate feels exaltation, being named and exemplar son by the mayor. There is, or course, no way to quantify the public excitement over this event, but given the newspaper coverage and the accounts of docks being sunk under the weight of the crowd and the thousands that lined the shore this seems to have been the case.

⁹⁴⁴ *Diario de la Marina*, 8 September 1923.

⁹⁴⁵ Edward J. Neil, "Cuba cuenta con una estrella en el reino de Pugilism (Cuba has a star in the realm of pugilism)", *Diario de la Marina*, 8 September 1929.

⁹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* "

⁹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

martyred in 1896 during the Cuban Wars for Independence. While Recio spoke in the patio of the colonial era prison on the Prado (temporarily housing the Ayuntamiento), the crowd grew impatient and the boxer and the government functionaries took the balcony overlooking the crowd. Pincho and the Kid received medals from the government to the thunderous applause of the gathered public.⁹⁴⁸

In anticipation of the Kid's return, in early September of 1929, Havana mayor Miguel Mariano Gómez along with representatives from the most elite Afro-Cuban social club, the *Club Atenas*, celebrated a special session of the *Ayuntamiento* to pay homage to the ascendant career of Eligio Sardiñas Montalvo, the "beloved Kid Chocolate" upon his victorious return from the United States.⁹⁴⁹ Afro-Cuban civil society, even the less elite fraternal organizations like the *Unión Fraternal*, the *Club Jóvenes del Vals* and the *Magnetic Club* along with the aristocratic scions of white, elite Cubans (Mayor Gómez was the son of former President José Miguel Gómez) voted to award the boxer and his white "irreplaceable" manager Luis "Pincho" Gutiérrez medals as heroes of the nation. Florentino Pedroso, the director of the Afro-Cuban revista *Renacimiento* and an "enthusiastic admirer" of the boxer, served as the director of the

⁹⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁹ The *Club Atenas* was the most elite Afro-Cuban social club. Membership requirements included a college degree, a dress code, and prohibitively high fees that excluded even middle-class Afro-Cubans. The Club was a conduit for Afro-Cuban political action and along with working and middle-class *Unión Fraternal* sought to influence government action to apply Cuban "raceless" rhetoric in everyday life. For example, both groups wrote letters of protest and demonstrated against racial discrimination in hotel accommodations in the 1930s against the actions of the owner of the Havana Hotel Saratoga hotel for supposedly (the event is not clear) discriminating against the African-American Congressman Arthur Mitchell. See: *ANC, Fondo Secretaria de la Presidencia Caja 39, Numero 19*. For a detailed account of the public outrage and protest generated by this event see Frank Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African-Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), pp. 171-75. On the class composition of these Afro-Cuban clubs see Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness*, pp. 38-40. For an account of the special session of the Ayuntamiento to celebrate Kid Chocolate's return to Cuba, in which representatives of the major Havana newspapers also took part, see Guillermo Pi, "Homenaje a Eligio Sardiñas 'Chocolate,'" *El Diario de la Marina*, 1 September 1929.

commission to receive him and obtained the services of the municipal band to greet the boxer and his manager upon their arrival in Havana harbor.⁹⁵⁰

As Robin Moore has shown, the *Club Atenas* was highly selective in its valorization of the cultural manifestations of Afro-Cubans. Into the 1950s, popular Afro-Cuban music and dance traditions such as *son* and *mambo* were repressed by the public representatives of black Cubans in favor of more European, “smooth” forms of expression. While upper-class whites in the 1920s and 30s encouraged and emulated Afro-Cuban popular culture and appropriated music and dance as emblematic of Cuban national identity, many elite Afro-Cubans disdained them as remnants of lower-class, even atavistic black Cuban culture.⁹⁵¹ The *Club Atenas*’ official support and admiration for the class ascendant Cuban boxer suggests the ambiguity of certain cultural practices as symbols of high cultural attainment among Afro-Cubans whose purported goal was to integrate and educate their fellow black Cubans into mainstream ideas of propriety and sociability. Fame, it seems, was enough to impel members of *Club Atenas* to put their stamp of approval on the athletic endeavors of the former shoe shiner and newspaper crier.⁹⁵²

Though Kid Chocolate was almost universally praised by Afro-Cubans and white Cubans from across the political spectrum as symbol of national pride and achievement in the competitive arenas of the north, Afro-Cubans debated the form and semantics of this valorization. From Havana, to Camaguey, to Santiago de Cuba, Afro-Cuban writers wrestled with the significance of Kid Chocolate’s rise to fame and the example it provided for Cuban youth. For Nemesio Lavié, an author and journalist from Oriente, Afro-Cuban

⁹⁵⁰ “Bibliografía de autores de la raza de color, de Cuba,” *Cuba Contemporanea*, 1 January 1927, p. 69.

⁹⁵¹ The Club Atenas regarded itself as the representative of the “high life de color,” in Cuba. “El Banquete del Club Atenas,” in *Ideales de Una Raza*, 30 September 1929.

⁹⁵² Kid Chocolate’s background is explored in Elio Menéndez and Víctor Joaquín Ortega, *Kid Chocolate: El Boxeo Soy Yo*.

acknowledgement of the Cuban athlete *as an Afro-Cuban* was a self-defeating symbol of racial inferiority.⁹⁵³ He argued that the language used in the praise lavished on Chocolate in the weekly newspaper section *Ideales de Una Raza* increased the racial divisions between Cubans by acknowledging that the boxer was of African descent and therefore not entirely and primarily Cuban. Though Kid Chocolate had risen to “the plane of consecration” and deserved public acknowledgment of his achievements, to list him as an Afro-Cuban, according to Lavié, implied an inherent sense of surprise at the success of those with black skin. Lavié used the opportunity provided by the voluminous and near euphoric editorializing on Kid Chocolate to impugn the entire Afro-Cuban intellectual team that published the weekly Afro-Cuban perspective column in the conservative newspaper *El Diario de la Marina*.⁹⁵⁴

The young writer and poet Nicolás Guillén, who closely followed Cuban boxing and eulogized Kid Chocolate in his 1929 poem “Pequeña Oda a un Negro Boxeador” reacted with surprise and indignation to Lavié’s chastisement. He defended the main target of these attacks, the section’s bilingual editor Gustavo Urutia, against the accusation that he sowed racial division by maintaining the inferiority of black Cubans through the very existence of *Ideales de Una Raza*. For Guillén, Lavié misunderstood the mission of the team of writers that collaborated on the weekly examination of Afro-Cuban society. Lavié was “blind” to the fact that these intellectuals and poets enjoyed the esteem of their white colleagues in their attempts to unify the races through a critical examination of the numerous “exes on the chalkboard,” placed against the advancement of Afro-Cubans. To gloss over these realities in pretending that key differences did not exist only exacerbated the problems. The social barriers experienced by Afro-Cubans would be overcome by honestly examining the issues and pointing out hypocrisy, learning from

⁹⁵³ Nemesio Lavié, “Blanco y Negro,” *Diario de Cuba*, 4 September 1929.

⁹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Lavié, “Blanco y Negro”

foreign examples of race relations, and celebrating the achievements of those black Cubans who excelled in any field, be it art or athletics. Furthermore, with the understanding and support of white Cuban intellectuals and journalists, *Ideales de Una Raza* sought to bridge the racial divides inherent in modern Cuba by celebrating Afro-Cubans *as* Cubans. They sought contributions from African-Americans in an attempt to forge transnational intellectual ties that would widen cultural engagement and raise the level of discourse among Afro-Cubans and African-Americans. Kid Chocolate served as a conduit for Afro-Cuban-African American discourse.

The end product, Guillen argued, was to celebrate *cubanidad* in the form of Kid Chocolate as a whole through the valorization of one of its representatives. Lavié, and those like him who had “already arrived” at elite status were part of the problem that prevented a straightforward acknowledgement of racially divided Cuba. Guillen further argued that to solve these national issues, one must speak both in the “language of Cuba” and “in the Negro language, which is the language of justice.” Boxing, and Kid Chocolate, were fodder for divisive ideas on how Afro-Cubans should seek advancement within a racially charged society.⁹⁵⁵

In a less critical and vehemently positive vein, one writer from Camaguey expressed in nearly euphoric tone the national sentiment evidenced by the enormous public affection and codified by the governmental decree of congratulation to Kid Chocolate:

Eligio Sardiñas y Montalvo, a nineteen year old *negríto*, who was born in a miserable house in the shanty town of Cerro, in the capital of the Republic, has become a great

⁹⁵⁵ Nicolás Guillén, “La Humildad, Kid Chocolate, y El Señor Lavié,” *Ideales de una Raza* in *El Diario de la Marina*, 15 September 1929.

citizen in this historic moment, admired and revered by all of his compatriots and is surrounded by the aura of an authentic national hero.⁹⁵⁶

In hyperbolic prose, the editorialist argued that Kid Chocolate was the greatest boxer of all time and that his celebrity rivaled that of aviator Charles Lindbergh. The boxer was even more worthy of admiration because he was the son of a nobody, claimed no exalted lineage, and yet through his dedication and natural ability had risen to the heights of fame. He had “made a magnificent affirmation of the sporting capacity of Cubans for great undertakings and placed the name of the *patria* at an immeasurable height.” Kid Chocolate, the hyperbole continued, was the paragon of a modern, democratic Cuba, where all, regardless of race or class, had the same opportunities for greatness. He was comparable to Alexander the Great, but unlike him had earned fame through his honestly and individually attained merits, not through inheritance. Perhaps most importantly, “Kid Chocolate represents a most beautiful, edifying, educative, transcendent example for all of his compatriots and especially for his kind, the negro Cubans!”⁹⁵⁷ It was thanks to democracy, the same forces that transformed Abraham Lincoln from “woodcutter to statesman,” that allowed the boxer to rise “from an unhappy and needy child into an idol of his people and the glory of world sport.”

Though the language of these elegies borders on the absurd, they capture the national sentiment surrounding the most well-known Afro-Cuban of his generation. As political and social tensions mounted and the nation was on the brink of civil war to end the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado, the celebration of Kid Chocolate as hero-athlete was universally accepted as a point of cohesion within Cuban national identity. Like José Martí, the young black athlete was

⁹⁵⁶ “La Lección que enseña Chocolate,” *El Camagueyano*, date unknown, reprinted in *Ideales de una Raza*, 15 September 1929.

⁹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, “La lección que enseña Chocolate.”

transformed into an image used by opposing sides of the political spectrum. From black nationalists, to the white conservative social and economic elite, to the activists in the League of Communist Youth, a Cuban champion was celebrated and raised as a symbol of national achievement and fair play. The public celebration of Kid Chocolate's success was expressed in the language of both civic and racial nationalism: for Afro-Cubans, the boxer was the foremost example of black Cuban success; for others his rise was proof of the opportunities for advancement that were a product of Cuban democracy.

The dramatic language and symbolism of sport and the popular appraisal of Cuban athletes as “bulwarks” of lower class masculinity in domestic and international competitions were appropriated by seemingly unlikely sources. Though Cuban sport idols, boxers in particular, had achieved enormous public notoriety and rapid financial success, they were portrayed by some political activists as victims of transnational capitalism and domestic class injustice. An undated pamphlet, from the late 1920s or early 1930s, published by the Communist Youth League of Havana, celebrated Kid Chocolate as a class hero worthy of emulation by poor Cuban youth in their struggle against the “traps” set for them by the international capitalist system in Cuba.⁹⁵⁸ While labeling the Cuban boxer as a ‘negrito,’ a racist term of paternalistic endearment often assigned to Afro-Cubans and a stock character played in black-face by white Cubans in popular theater, the Communist Youth repeatedly called for

⁹⁵⁸ *Archivo Nacional de Cuba*, Fondo Especial, Caja/Legajo 4, No. Nuevo 675. The *Liga Juvenil Comunista* was founded as offshoot of the Cuban Communist Party in 1929. It was centered in the University of Havana and eventually had chapters throughout the island. Their arguments against the corrupting capitalist forces that threatened to destroy athletes and other lower class Cubans came to fruition in 1961, when the Revolutionary government banned all professional athletics on the island as symbolic venues for the decadent and abusive practices of capitalism and imperialism. This pamphlet is one of the few surviving documents in the Cuban National Archives pertinent to sport during the Republican Period, even though the standardization and regulation of athletics by the 1920s produced voluminous documentation. It is likely not a coincidence that it was produced by the Communist Youth League which, in certain teleological histories is seen as one of many precursors to the the post-Revolutionary government. See L. Vizcaíno, *Apuntes para la historia del movimiento juvenil comunista y pioneril cubano* (La Habana: Editora Política, 1987); Donald F. Busky, *Communism in History and Theory: Asia, Africa, and the Americas* (Westport and London: Praeger, 2002).

popular emulation of the athlete due to his representation of Cuban “manliness,” and “self-discipline,” as a “sublime example,” of the perseverance of the Cuban poor.⁹⁵⁹ Though Kid Chocolate was a much vaunted example of the possibilities of lower class Cubans, he was still unable to transcend the mocking and racist portrayals of even those who celebrated his success. Race and class remained separate.

Despite losing some important matches in the United States and having his talent and potential leached by shadowy capitalist figures who sought to destroy his “crown and prestige,” for the Communist Youth Chocolate represented the “prestige of [their] country.” The Afro-Cuban boxer had been pushed, the League argued, into a “corrupt and disordered,” lifestyle by the malevolent representatives of capitalist society that used lower classed Cuban talent for its own ends before closing the door on upward mobility. Chocolate, the League implied, was further handicapped by his child-like intelligence: the credulity of the “negrito.” While living in Harlem, Kid Chocolate had imbibed the Bohemian atmosphere of the late 1920s and, many writers observed, had damaged his career potential by leading a dissolute lifestyle. The Kid, according to the propagandists, had fought through this adversity and risen to “definitive and grandiose” triumph by taking control of his life to lift himself out of the “quagmire” or the class system.

The pamphleteers insist on the worthiness of the Kid for the imitation of all Cuban youth and rhetorically ask their readers:

⁹⁵⁹ As Rine Leal and Robin Moore have shown, the term ‘negrito’ and its embodiment by black-faced white actors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was meant to mock and parody Afro-Cuban culture. As Moore writes, through white Cuban perceptions “... the stage *negrito* occupies the lowest social and cultural rung relative to other figures, even in early twentieth-century productions. His economic position is tenuous at best, his occupation depicted as subservient, criminal, or nonexistent. The *negrito* tends to be lacking in cultural development. His speech is deformed, his thought process slow—attributes thought to be comic.” Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness*, p. 46, and Rine Leal, *Breve historia del teatro cubano* (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1980).

How many youths don't dream of becoming a Kid in other sports and in other activities? How many don't dream of honors and laurels from his people? But their dreams are truncated when they crash against sad reality: a regime of pain and injustices that closes the doors of the future; that destroys all of their dreams and pushes them each day toward dishonor and obscurity. The Cuban youth suffers the same as Chocolate, the same disgraces of a youth who are shut out from all possibility of greatness, success and triumph.⁹⁶⁰

Without entering too deeply into the political debates surrounding the rise and fall of Machado regime, Kid Chocolate was a problematic representative of Communist aspirations for a more just and equitable society. Though he had risen through boxing to become perhaps the most well-known Afro-Cuban of his era, he embodied the extremes of capitalist consumption. He was popularly known to own over three hundred suits, one for each day of the year, drove new and expensive cars, and purchased a home in the all-white suburb of Marianao. The importance of his portrayal by the Communist Youth for this study is that it indicates the appropriation of his image as shorthand for larger economic and cultural issues, yet remained firmly embedded in traditional stereotypes of black Cubans. The pamphleteers draw on recent popular memory of the Kid, self-assured that their readers will all be aware of the events that led to the athletes defeat and interpreting them as symbolic, indeed the foremost symbol, of the plight of the Cuban poor.

As a professional athlete, Kid Chocolate utilized one of the few venues open to lower class Afro-Cubans in their successful challenge of the "traps" laid for them by the socio-economic system. The medium of his celebrity is central to the argument of his representative *cubanidad*. Sport as a quintessential democratic space contingent on little more than individual merit and not upon race or class had become a tool of first resort for class mobility and the showcase of Afro-Cuban achievement in an emblematically modern endeavor.

⁹⁶⁰ Ibid., ANC Fondo Especial, Caja/Legajo 4, No. Nuevo 675.

Conclusion

By the end of the 1920s, amidst growing popular discontent that would culminate with the overthrow of the Machado dictatorship a few years later, the public sphere in Cuba operated tangentially and often time at odds with the larger political discourses. Civil society continued to evince a fascination with modern forms of masculine display that opened new spaces and forms of social organization. In a broader sense, these cultural shifts survived and intensified amid or even despite the tumultuous political shifts that have accounted for much of the historiographical understanding of this period.

This novel orientation of the public sphere, taking place simultaneously in many Latin American nations, has proven to be more long-lasting than even the many political systems that have come and gone in the ensuing decades. Cuba, in particular, is a prime case study in the tenacity with which culture hangs on even amid the most dramatic changes and attempts at cultural reorientation. While the Castro government disdained professional athletics as the product of capitalist cultural decadence, the underlying ideas about manhood, the body, and the competitive engagement of modernity have remained as strong as ever. Kid Chocolate's face still stares out with a confident smile, greeting impoverished Cubans on the sidewalk in front of the massive *Capitolio* building in the most central area of Havana. Félix Savón, the three time Olympic boxing champion, advertises the local Havana television station, where he is portrayed as the most masculine of Cuban patriots.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS: FROM FOREIGN BARBARISM TO NATIONAL PRIDE

In this dissertation, I have examined pugilism from its controversial beginnings until its popularization in Mexico and Cuba and argued that this process of appropriation took place between the 1890s and the 1930s. I have portrayed boxing as a means to show processes that are connected to, but go far beyond sport history-- as a way to narrate and expose wider ideas of cultural change and the Mexican and Cuban engagement with modern transnational cultures of masculinity, national identity, and race. The terms used to describe this process whereby something once exotic becomes nationalized to the extent that it is a mainstay of local popular culture, a point of pride across the class spectrum, and an important signifier of national identity and masculinity, are many. Whether this process is called negotiation, syncretism, imagination, or appropriation, the ever evolving outcome is highly visible today. Modern sport is one of the few, at least perceived, legal means of upward mobility in Mexico and among economically disadvantaged *Chicanos* and *Cubanos* in the United States.⁹⁶¹

From the 1890s to the 1930s, the popularization of physical culture and boxing paralleled what I call a broadening of the boundaries of *lo cubano* and *lo mexicano*. In the first period, I have shown that elite commentators in the public sphere were split over the meanings of this cultural import. For most, the highly symbolic practice of boxing was paired with such degrading American cultural features as lynching. Taken together, boxing, lynching, and racial discrimination were posed as a mirror and counter-narrative to widespread ideas of the racial and cultural superiority of those most often referred to as Anglo-Saxon peoples. The science of

⁹⁶¹ Professional sport is illegal in Cuba as of 2011.

eugenics and the diffusion of Spencerian ideas of cultural and racial hierarchies caused many observers across the region to search for methods through which Latin Americans could literally change national bodies and other attributes deemed central to the positive evolution of their cultures.

As North American influence in the form of capital, politics, and popular culture extended through Latin America in the early twentieth century, lower-class black, white, and Asian practitioners of the “science” of self-defense traveled and worked throughout the region. As members of the marginal classes in the United States, these boxers and wrestlers and their culture enjoyed a highly visible presence and broad influence in Mexico and Cuba. Their *de facto* representation of American popular culture often ran counter to the refined ways in which the more established and conservative “American colonies” sought to present themselves.

The American victory over the Spanish in 1898 and the Japanese defeat of the Russians in 1905 gave “physical cultures” (boxing, jiu-jitsu, bodybuilding, and even sumo wrestling) from these two emergent powers the force of revealed truth: nations that cultivated and celebrated “manly arts” ascended to the apex of the Social Darwinist hierarchy. No longer tied to Victorian ideals of masculinity that celebrated refinement, reflection and a sedate version of manhood, Latin Americans from across the class spectrum increasingly celebrated vigorous and muscular “virility.” Sports like boxing became a salient feature of civic social organization and cultural engagement outside of traditional means of masculine self-representation. Where once the military or dueling provided proving grounds for aristocratic honor, sport now provided a novel cross-class pursuit where once-marginal Cubans and Mexicans became national symbols of excellence.

The newly popular practice of imported blood sport challenged government regulation of public entertainments. With no regulatory infrastructure for combat sport in place, the police and government officials played a game of catch-up to the evolving tastes of the populace. The vacillating and decades-long process that culminated in the legalization of prizefighting across Latin America by the early 1920s showed political and cultural resistance and later accommodation to what was from the early nineteenth century deemed “Anglo-Saxon barbarism.” Cultural critics, mainly in the growing press, argued in the early years of the twentieth century that the appropriation of modern sport would have regenerative effects for the masculine nation as a whole. Among other factors, the cultural diffusion of virile masculinity would make good soldiers and brace Cubans and Mexicans for the challenges of modern, urban life. These justifications often appeared as apologia, seeking to elevate popular passions to the level of national honor.

The often theoretical and decades long debate among the elite was largely overridden by the more immediate and widespread celebration of local *boxers del patio* (local boys) who rose to fame and wealth in the 1920s. The cultural elite, men like Federico Gamboa and, had he lived, José Martí had or would have had to stomach a grudging acceptance of imported blood sport as a feature of working-class culture. This expansion of Mexican and Cuban culture was a thoroughly transnational process and the sites where these dramatic narratives were dispersed were largely made possible by new media, especially radio. The availability of cheap written sources like *El Imparcial* in Mexico and *El Mundo* in Cuba reacted to and helped to constitute the lucrative market of new consumers of athletic news from abroad, guided governments in the first tentative steps toward making new regulations, and fueled public engagement with local and international events and celebrities: often citing men like Luis Ángel Firpo (Argentina), Rodolfo

Casanova (Mexico), Eladio Valdéz (Cuba), Jack Johnson, Jack Dempsey and Georges Carpentier as paragons of modern manhood worthy of imitation.

This study de-centered government and showed it to be an actor of secondary importance when studying the transmission and appropriation of certain features of popular culture. Attempts to prohibit the implantation of boxing failed as practitioners and fans took boxing underground or to areas of uncertain jurisdiction. This was followed by temporary legalizations and the first steps toward regulation. By the end of the period, government facilitated the culture of boxing as a site where national heroes were created first in the public sphere and only later valorized by official recognition. Sport became one of the few avenues through which members of the lower classes—Afro-Cuban laborers and newspaper criers—Mexican shop-workers and miners—came to symbolize *Mexicanidad* and *Cubanidad* in the transnational public sphere. Ideally, at least, Mexicans and Cubans challenged cultural and physical dominance of Americans and other foreigners on the leveling plane of a meritocratic, rule driven, and popular pursuit.

Central in this evolution from foreign barbarism into local culture was the broadening of social spaces for participation embodied in new social clubs and qualitative shifts in media coverage that privileged commentary on foreign and local transnational cultures. Where in the 1890s thousands of Mexicans voted with their feet, boarding trains to view a prizefight between foreigners in a neighboring state where it was tenuously legal, by the 1920s tens of thousands spent hard earned pesos to attend bouts where Mexicans, literally wrapped in the flag, challenged foreign boxers who had claimed the title “Champion of Mexico.” Boxing was controversial and loaded with gendered, nationalistic and racial overtones in the United States and in Cuba and Mexico. In Cuba, one of the only examples of Afro-Cuban greatness that commentators could draw upon was the example of Antonio Maceo, the hero of the Wars for Independence and they

paired him with Afro-Cuban boxers who became “*champions de la patria.*” In Mexico, lower class boxers were among the first working-class individuals to be touted as evidence of Mexican accomplishment abroad in a medium dominated by foreigners. Today, 2011, most champion boxers at work in the United States claim Latin American heritage. This is a vastly different picture than one would have painted in 1920.

In both Cuba and Mexico during this period, the complexity and depth of civil society were extended first through changes in popular tastes for entertainment and only later codified into national life by legislators. By the late 1920s, Cubans and Mexicans from around the national territories expressed themselves as members of transnational public, *aficionados*, or the “fancy” that consumed highly theatrical images of virile masculinity. The rise of Mexican and Cuban boxers in this period served as a mechanism through which these aficionados were further drawn into international events often expressing their allegiances in forceful language that evoked racial solidarity and regional and national identities. New publications such as *Nocaut* in Cuba and *Aficion* in Mexico catered to the enormous popularity of what once had been an exotic and raffish sampling of lower class American culture. These specialized media sources provided outlets for the expression of what had become “national passions.”

Beyond a colorful collection of anecdotes, I hope this study contributes to the field in several ways. By de-centering the state and working in the interstices between elite and popular cultures, this narrative fleshes out untold stories that complicate our understanding of how Mexican and Cuban cultures evolved against the backdrop of the upheavals of the early twentieth century. The popular cultures of sport have been both deployed by and have outlasted political regimes; functioning as a point of political legitimacy in the case of Cuba. I also sought to tap into the growing enthusiasm for transnational history by tracing the movement of both

individuals and ideas that crossed borders with varying degrees of difficulty and that have received scant attention. While the state remains a unit of analysis, it is secondary to both local and transnational ideological currents and tastes. For a sugar-cane cutter from the rural interior of Cuba to name himself “Black Dempsey” and take up a marginal sport as a means of self-advancement illustrates an early strain of globalization absent from most historiography of Latin America during this period.

I also hoped to challenge generalizations of Cuban and Mexican culture in this period that focus on the mimetic engagement of transnational ideas. By showing resistance, debate, and transformations that took place on ideological and even corporeal levels, I hope I have demonstrated the need to reevaluate the metrics that have been used to determine such abstractions as tradition and authenticity. The diversity of cultural factors that constituted *lo Cubano* and *lo mexicano* in the public sphere looked very different in 1930 than they had in 1890. The affective power of celebrity, the cult of virile masculinity and ideas about the racialized body and sport, as Hobsbawm has argued, constituted one of the most important new social factors at the end of the nineteenth century. I argue that it is now impossible to approach Latin American culture in general without understanding the cross-class, interracial, and transnational importance of sport as rallying point for national identities across the region.

This study started in an attempt to explain and understand individuals and processes that clashed with the extant historiography. I hope that I have chosen amid the hundreds of anecdotes from this period a collection of compelling stories that, together, constitute a fresh and engaging way to looking at culture and ideas in this period of enormous and often tragic upheaval.

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