III. Europe


This issue on Shaping the Superman focuses on use of the powerful male body as image of superiority and militarism and as icon of fascist Germany’s Aryan Superman, a metaphor and an “inviolable, invulnerable, dominant and moral symbol.” The writings of Spencer, Darwin, Nietzsche, and others supplied the theoretical, scientific, and philosophical bases for “survival of the fittest” as excuse for military aggression, particularly against other races, by those who considered themselves to be superior. Based on secondary sources; 61 notes.

—RICHARD V. McGEHEE


The body is the most important image in Western culture. Its representation in art must be analyzed in terms of its ownership and its relation to society and politics. Images
considered unacceptable are attacked because of their power to instruct and inspire. Christianity and Fascism used art to link identity with a messenger of sacred power. For Fascism this was the Superman. The superior Aryan Body was presented not only in art but in sport fields, military camps, and youth groups. Based on secondary sources; 68 notes.

—RICHARD V. McGEHEE


Racist ideas arose in France and Germany in an attempt to establish a biological basis for the privileges of nobility. Social Darwinism used cultural-historical explanations of race to support evolution and selection, and then transferred biologic ideas back into society. Aryans (whites) were considered superior and the founders of all cultures. Jews were discriminated against before 1880 on a religious basis; afterwards, anti-Semitism was based on classifying Jews as an inferior race which should be eliminated. Based on secondary sources; 62 notes.

—RICHARD V. McGEHEE


Prior to taking power in Germany, the Nazis planned to improve the Aryan race through elimination of “defective” individuals and races and through selectively breeding supermen. After 1933 they put their eugenics ideas into practice, emphasizing physical education over academic studies as a means of improving Aryan man. They placed sport under government control and promoted elite sport. Nazi schools and Hitler Youth programs especially stressed physical activities. Based on secondary sources; 133 notes.

—RICHARD V. McGEHEE


The Nazis sought high performance in all aspects of life and stressed the importance of developing physically superior beings through sporting activity. International sport victories were desired as indicators of national superiority, but record-setting performances in elite sport should reflect the development of the race rather than the individuality of the champion. Since World War II, German sporting nationalism and state support of sport have increased. Based on primary and secondary sources; 61 notes.

—RICHARD V. McGEHEE

*Olympia* has been considered as both a documentary presentation of an event designed for propaganda purposes and as a propaganda vehicle itself. It presented the Nazi regime as a continuation of classical culture and identified it with new traditions, such as the torch relay. Some elements of aestheticism in the film have little or no ideological content. Riefenstahl’s works offered connections between German nationalism and Romanticism and contributed to Nazi glorification of physicality and the body. Based on secondary sources; 57 notes.

—Richard V. McGehee


Works of art frequently reflect the cultures and societies in which they are created. Fascist art and its use for political purposes had an English and European heritage in 18th and 19th century art extolling nationalism and patriotism. From the Late 1800s, German nudism and the portrayal of male nudes in art promoted racial ideals, the connection between physical beauty and moral and mental development, and the glorification of heroic warriorhood. Based on secondary sources; 139 notes.

—Richard V. Gehee


Art production and exhibition were highly controlled by Hitler and the Nazis. Modern art was rejected. Sculpture was favored over other forms, and Arno Breker’s nude males were the most striking representations of the supreme Aryan man—cool, confident, strong, and aggressive. Many scholars dismiss Nazi art as bad or “non-art,” but its power inspired many Germans. Superman images live on today in Rambo, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Nuke Duke. Based on secondary sources; 119 notes.

—Richard V. McGehee


The Nazis’ *Kulturpolitik* dominated German mass culture. New mass events and demonstrations were established, and traditional national and religious holidays were converted into spectacular political festivals. May Day was stripped of its class struggle meaning and became just another propaganda vehicle for Nazi solidarity. Power, violence, and
death were glorified in the cult of German Fascism, exemplified in the aesthetics, attitudes, actions, and aura of the SS. Based on secondary sources; 31 notes.

—RICHARD V. McGEHEE


D.H. Lawrence’s contempt for democracy was expressed best in The Plumed Serpent, his novel in which the political and social systems of 20th century Mexico are overthrown and replaced by a (superior) ancient Aztec system. Lawrence uses his story to reject individuality and to promote the attractiveness of authoritarian rule, the male body, men’s dominance over women, and the superiority of “blood knowledge” over intellect. Based on primary and secondary sources; 25 notes.

—RICHARD V. McGEHEE


The warrior hero, known from antiquity, is still prominent in Western society. Media glorification of fictional violent heroes propagates myths involving ideas of security and sacrifice. Concepts of masculinity have been tied to inclination toward, and participation in, war and violence, and especially suffering and death for one’s country. However, future wars will increasingly include female warriors. Based on secondary sources; 55 notes.

—RICHARD V. McGEHEE


The terminology of sport became widely developed and incorporated into everyday speech in the 1800s and 1900s. However, sport language and its use as metaphors in non-sport context was already widespread in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century French. Terms from ancient sports and contemporary activities as billiards, croquet, bowling, and, especially, tennis (jeu de paume and longue paume) appeared in French dictionaries of the late 1600s and earlier. Based on primary and secondary sources; 137 notes.

—RICHARD V. McGEHEE
Roller skating, as a summer substitute for ice skating, existed in Europe by 1720. Most early skates used inline wheels. Recreational rink skating expanded greatly around 1876, but it soon faded. Another boom began in the early 1900s (when quad-wheel design became popular) but foundered by 1914. Austria experienced great interest in skating during periods of both boom and bust. Participants were mainly upper middle class and aristocrats. Based on primary and secondary sources; 94 notes.

—RICHARD V. McGHEE

The development of physical education in Belgium has been influenced by many foreign cultures since the early nineteenth century. Advocates of various physical education ideologies, including German Turnen and Swedish Gymnastics, struggled to promote their beliefs in a Belgian athletic system that was going through significant change. Swedish gymnastics eventually won the physical education battle. When modern British sports were imported around the 1860s physical culture became complete. Based on primary and secondary sources; one table.

—VALERIE WENTLING

There are many types of sport museums throughout the world. In the same way, there are a variety of sport historians. The relationship between museums and historians must become reciprocal for the success of both parties and the enjoyment of the public. This can be done through clarification, confirmation, and validation of artifacts and events. These guidelines will ensure that sports history exhibited in museums accurately captures the scenario. Based on primary and secondary sources.

—VALERIE WENTLING

The end of the Olympic Games at Olympia is an uncertain historical event. It is often thought that excessive professionalism resulted in the decline of the games; however, this hypothesis is unsupported. Few historical documents chronicle the Games’ deterioration,
and those that do often conflict. Events that may have impacted the games include the initiation of prohibitory laws, organized Christianity’s position toward the Games, the fate of gymnasia, and the decline of the city of Elis. Based on primary and secondary sources.

—Valerie Wentling


Over the last century bodybuilding has changed drastically, due to many scientific and technical improvements. Eugene Sandow developed a training program that utilized progressive resistance principles in conjunction with dumbbells. Although his program had many conceptual errors, it became one of the major stepping stones for further development in the field. Through application of scientific methods, additional training theories were developed and instituted as physiological principles became better understood. Based on primary and secondary sources.

—Valerie Wentling


Catholic Action was a movement initiated by Pope Pius XI in the early 1900s in which laymen played a major role in the “re-christianization” of society. In Belgium, these leaders focused much of their attention on the physical and spiritual maturity of gymnasts in an effort to make them proper role models. These athletes staunchly supported Catholic beliefs and developed into the largest gymnastics federation still in existence today. Based on primary and secondary sources.

—Valerie Wentling


Fine arts and literature influenced the revival of the Olympic Games. Beginning with the first meeting of the International Olympic Committee and continuing into the years throughout their reintroduction, literature, poetry, art, sculpture, music, postage stamps, and architecture in Athens and around the world depicted images inspired by the games and the athletes involved. Based on primary and secondary sources; 55 notes.

—Valerie Wentling
With influence extending both directly and indirectly into the twentieth century, Cotton and Coubertin were major agents of change in sport from the 1850s on. Cotton used games as instruments of social control in private British boarding schools. As a consequence, Coubertin’s concept of “fair play” became an increasingly inherent value of British sport, as athletic masters instituted a code of proper conduct. This behavior became associated with the social and moral standards of the “English Gentleman”. Based on primary and secondary sources; three tables.

—VALERIE WENTLING

Although Baron Pierre de Coubertin is often considered to be the father of the modern Olympic Games, Evangelis Zappas laid much of the groundwork for their revival. Due to Zappas’s persistence and initiative, Greek King Otto allowed the games to be re-instituted. These events, unlike the games of modern times, included industrial and agricultural exhibitions as well as athletics. With time and Coubertin’s subsequent efforts, Zappas’s games have developed into the modern Olympics. Based on primary and secondary sources.

—VALERIE WENTLING

Location, timing, and source of the initial interest in the revival of the Olympic games have been debated and revised as a result of new information. Archives show that many similar contests, whether they were considered “the Olympics” or not, took place as early as 1829. Evangelis Zappas’s contribution to the games was a catalyst to their reinstitution. Other social and economic factors influenced the decision to renew the games as well. Based on primary and secondary sources; one table.

—VALERIE WENTLING

Sport has been integral to military training throughout history. Combat sport is of particular significance in defense situations. The difference between combat and sport lies in the spirit behind them, and the rules to which they are restricted. Sport has also created
an arena where psychosocial tensions of athletes and fans can be relieved. Pseudosports such as dueling and jousting played a similar role of tension release in the military. Based on primary and secondary sources.

—Valerie Wentling


The study of the development and implementation of Volata, an Italian game designed in the 1920s, can assist in the understanding of Fascist sport ideology. Volata was created to replace soccer (*calcio*) as the nation’s pastime. This combination of football, rugby, and basketball created an environment in which Fascist thought could be nurtured. The rise and fall of Volata lasted a mere seven years due to the changing political and athletic circumstances. Based on primary and secondary sources.

—Valerie Wentling


German-Italian youth activities, including sporting events, laid the groundwork for foreign policy in Europe during the 1940s. Youth participation in foreign sporting events was an attempt by the Axis powers to manipulate and reorient political affiliations. The propaganda associated with these events was implemented through the European Youth Organization. Participation in the “European Youth Fighting Games” peaked during a politically precarious decade in Europe; however, it was eventually curtailed by preparations for war. Based on primary and secondary sources; 2 tables, 101 notes.

—Valerie Wentling


After 1933 the German Turnen methods of physical education were utilized to enhance the involvement of women in sport. As various sport specific groups emerged, a committee for Women’s sport also evolved. All female sporting activities which did not hinder the matriarchal role that women were to play in German society were strongly supported, in line with the Aryan philosophy. Based on primary and secondary sources; 24 notes.

—Valerie Wentling
The role of football in Spain changed throughout the twentieth century from one of promotion of a single identity to a vehicle of nationalist/regionalist expression. Real Madrid and FC Barcelona, two of the oldest clubs in Spain, present a detailed timeline of their political and social influences from their inception to the present. Real Madrid enjoyed the support and favors of the Franco regime, while FC Barcelona opposed this philosophy and entwined itself into a democratic system. In the post-Civil War era much media-hyped hostility remains between the teams. Based on primary and secondary sources.

—VALERIE WENTLING