American Sport Policy and the Cultural Cold War: The Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Years

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From its inception, the Cold War was fought on a variety of fronts, which, fortunately, never extended into direct military confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. Instead, the two superpowers, aware of the catastrophic effects of a nuclear conflagration, avoided armed interchanges in favor of more subtle applications of power. The American containment doctrine thus deviated from its original focus on political and military applications of “counter-force” to encompass cultural isolation of the Communist world as well.1 The resulting propaganda campaign for world opinion included the development of an athletic rivalry between the United States and its Communist rivals.2 Although several works have touched on sport in the cultural Cold War, those addressing efforts by the U.S. government to influence international athletics are

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relatively scarce. Addressing the subject in terms of federal initiatives during the 1960s, this article will argue that the years of the Lyndon B. Johnson presidential administration served as an important transition period between competing visions of American sport policy.

Johnson's immediate predecessors in the White House, Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy, believed in the necessity of a broadly-based national fitness campaign to reverse the country's declining levels of physical fitness. Later, Presidents Richard M. Nixon and Gerald R. Ford, alarmed at the United States' poor performance at the 1972 Munich Olympic games, would focus on the need for reform among the country's amateur sport bodies in order to increase American competitiveness in international athletic competitions. In the interim, members of the Johnson administration struggled with how best to use sport as a means of influence in the cultural Cold War. While their efforts rarely reached the desk of the chief executive, entities such as the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports and the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs offered a number of athletic programs. These endeavors, however, were relatively uncoordinated and when combined with the country's already unwieldy athletic system produced an ineffectual national sport policy. This can, of course, be partly explained by a federalist political ideology in the United States, whereby such “minor” affairs as sport traditionally fall beneath the jurisdiction of the national government. The resulting position of athletics in the American political system, in which it is chiefly addressed at state and local levels of governance, is perhaps best exemplified by the lack, in contrast to many other countries, of a federal ministry for sport. Even when the Cold War stimulated involvement with the issue, the importance of athletics to federal policymakers can be easily overstated. Hampered by an increasingly expensive war in Vietnam, the Johnson administration, for example, had other priorities under its ambitious Great Society program. Nevertheless, American sport, used in conjunction with other forms of cultural diplomacy, played an important—though underappreciated—part in the administration's struggle to win the hearts and minds of the world.

During the mid 1950s, President Eisenhower, concerned at the declining fitness levels of American children and military draftees, established the President's Council on Youth Fitness. Conceived by the president as a central coordinating body rather than an extensive federal undertaking, the Council reflected the administration's belief, in Eisenhower's words, that “the fitness of our young people is essentially a home and local community problem.” Nevertheless, the Council leadership advocated improved fitness on the part of the entire population as the federal government's central goal. As articulated by Dr. Shane MacCarthy, its executive director, “Perhaps as we consider the next Olympics, the theme should be not so much ‘Win in [the 1960 games in] Rome’ as ‘Win at home.’” In terms of benefits for elite international athletics, MacCarthy continued, “If we succeed in getting our country off its seat and on its feet, the victories in the field of international competition will inevitably follow.”

Eisenhower's successor in the White House, John F. Kennedy, took a broader view toward the relationship between sport and the Cold War. As part of his campaign for a “New Frontier” in American life, Kennedy authored a 1960 article for Sports Illustrated magazine titled “The Soft American” that gave voice to his apprehension of the increasing
fragility of the populace. “We face in the Soviet Union,” he asserted, “a powerful and implacable adversary determined to show the world that only the Communist system possesses the vigor and determination necessary to satisfy awakening aspirations for progress.” American fitness was consequently crucial to the waging of the Cold War and might even, according to the president-elect, “determine the future of freedom in the years to come.” He therefore concluded that “only if our citizens are physically fit will they be fully capable of such an effort.” The Eisenhower and Kennedy approaches to sport policy thus linked the imperative of physical fitness on the part of all Americans to the effective opposition of the Socialist challenge.

Following Kennedy’s assassination, the relative successes of Soviet-bloc teams in international competitions caused the Lyndon B. Johnson presidential administration to become increasingly drawn away from issues of national physical fitness. Instead, they sought to address problems in the country’s elite amateur sport system. Worried that it “looks like we’re going to do badly” in the upcoming Tokyo Olympic games, Attorney General Robert Kennedy told Johnson in May of 1964 that “the sports organization in the United States—it’s not what it should be.” “We don’t really know what we have in this country,” Kennedy continued, “and if we want to do well in the athletic field—and I feel it is important that we do—we could do much better than we have done in the past.” He therefore suggested that the administration undertake a study with the aim of creating a “program or suggestion in the field of athletics for you and for the American public.” More importantly for the president, who faced reelection in November of 1964, Kennedy recognized the domestic campaign value of Olympic medals. He therefore concluded, “I think it would be very helpful politically if you’re on top of that [sport problem].”

In July of 1964, Kennedy published his thoughts in what amounted to nothing less than a sports manifesto for the American people. “Part of a nation’s prestige in the cold war is won in the Olympic Games,” he began. “In this day of international stalemates nations use the scoreboard of sports as a visible measuring stick to prove their superiority over the ‘soft and decadent’ democratic way of life.” The “success of Red-bloc countries in the Olympics and other international competitions” in comparison to the United States was intolerable in that it “has given these nations an appearance of strength.” It was, according to the attorney general, “thus in our national interest that we regain our Olympic superiority; that we once again give the world visible proof of our inner strength and vitality.” In view of this environment, Kennedy accordingly argued that there must be “encouragement—with action as well as words—by government at all levels.”

Like the attorney general, members of Congress expressed concern with the country’s fading position in international athletics. As Congress’s most vociferous critic of American sport, Senator (and soon to be Vice President) Hubert Humphrey issued a sharp warning regarding the devastating effects of continued Soviet dominance in the Olympic movement. The senator stressed that “the Russians are feverishly building toward what they expect to be a major Cold War victory in 1964: a massive triumph in the Tokyo Olympics.” “Once they have crushed us in the coming Olympic battle,” Humphrey continued, “the Red propaganda drums will thunder out in a worldwide tattoo, heralding the ‘new Soviet men and women’ as ‘virile, unbeatable conquerors’ in sports—or anything else.” In September of 1962, he even requested that the Department of State conduct a “full report” on the status of the U.S.-Soviet athletic rivalry.
After President Johnson took office, Senator Humphrey expounded on the destructive effects of a longstanding feud between America’s two most important amateur sport organizations: the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). He wrote to Johnson in January of 1964 that “you may wish to consider appointment of a White House commission on Sports. It could help prevent an all-out ‘war’ which threatens to break out between amateur sports groups. . . . A permanent ‘peace’ might only come through comprehensive efforts of a Presidentially-approved Commission.” The United States Olympic Committee (USOC) was also troubled by the antagonism. “If we could just go back to an alliance between the AAU and the NCAA,” USOC President Kenneth Wilson lamented, “everything necessary for a complete Olympic development could be accomplished.” Louis C. Wyman, a Republican congressman from New Hampshire, likewise wrote to President Johnson that “our continuing defeats at the Olympic Games are a matter of concern to all Americans, regardless of political party.” Blaming “professional ringers” from the Communist-bloc, he believed that the United States should “be prepared to fight fire with fire at the 1968 Olympics” by providing federal support to U.S. athletes. As such, Wyman recommended that Johnson “appoint a study group, composed of knowledgeable men and women in this field, to report to you concerning this subject as soon as reasonably possible.”

Unbeknownst to Wyman, the Interagency Committee on International Athletics had already been created late in the Kennedy presidency to “collect, exchange, and review information concerning amateur athletic matters that might tend to affect the foreign relations or general welfare of the United States.” Chaired by Nicholas Rodis, special assistant for athletic programs in the State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the committee sought to coordinate the efforts of the different agencies within the federal government that were interested in sport. Improvement of America’s declining Olympic status was crucial, Rodis wrote to USOC President Wilson, given that “as international interest in athletics has grown, the presentation of United States athletes and athletic groups abroad has become more important as a factor in furthering United States foreign policy.” “The success or failure of these [sports] groups,” Rodis concluded, “is likely to be viewed as a reflection of the strength and weakness of our nation.”

Dissatisfaction with the existing condition also led to a collaborative effort between the USOC and the Johnson administration in enlisting the support of a private consulting firm, the Arthur D. Little Corporation, to analyze the troubles within the American sport system. Headed by former Lt. Gen. James Gavins, several of the firm’s associates met with members of the USOC and representatives from the State and Justice Departments to consider the idea of an amateur sports foundation. USOC official Franklin Orth was enthusiastic about the plan, arguing that the necessary reform could only “be furnished for all sports through a cooperation of effort by municipalities, counties and the Federal Government in a planned program.” To draw attention to the need for public support, he estimated that the Soviet government spent $1.2 billion on athletics in 1963 alone as part of “the policy of the Kremlin in the unrelenting battle to win men’s minds.”

On June 12, 1964, President Johnson met with Attorney General Kennedy and General Gavin to discuss their thoughts. In a subsequent letter to Gavin, Johnson requested that the company begin its investigation and expressed his appreciation that their deliberations “on the problem of achieving excellence in sports in this country were most helpful.”
“The improvement of the physical education of our young men and women thereby [sic] providing the opportunity for achieving high standards of excellence in amateur sports,” Johnson concluded, “is a matter of great importance, and I wish you well in this undertaking.”

Not much could be done, however, before the 1964 Tokyo games. Wilson accordingly wrote to Rodis, “I had high hopes that we would be able to solve permanently the many problems that are facing us now but it doesn’t look as if there is a ghost of a chance of doing anything except trying to field a number one team for Tokyo and then start our reorganization.”

Nevertheless, in April of 1964 William P. Bundy, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, sent a suggestion to the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs “in regard to exploitation of the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo.” Given the “intense interest in sports among youth in the underdeveloped countries and particularly in Asia,” he proposed that the United States Information Agency (USIA) and Voice of America “might with advantage develop an all-out program of coverage of the Games.” “Needless to say,” Bundy continued, “if film treatment could in the course of things show a degree of friendly fraternization between American Olympics teams and their counterparts from Asia and Africa this would add to interest.” The message was lost on USIA Director Carl Rowan, however, as he subsequently released a cable asserting that “the Games have relatively little relevance to USIA psychological objectives so that only limited selective coverage is regarded as justified.”

The State Department, on the other hand, recognized the potential propaganda value of the competitions. Martin McLaughlin, an official in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, sent a memorandum to Special Assistant Rodis stating: “I don’t feel it [Rowan’s message] is altogether responsive to the suggestions [Bundy] made.” Rodis replied that “there will be world-wide saturation coverage of the Olympic Games. Would this not . . . indicate the interest and importance the nations of the world place on the Olympics?” “And certainly,” he continued, “USIA should be attempting to utilize this interest to achieve their ‘Psychological Objectives.’” Rodis also supported linking the USIA coverage to the bureau’s cultural presentations and specialist programs through which American athletes and coaches were sent abroad to assist the sports programs of other countries. “I believe it would be of benefit,” Rodis wrote, “if developing nations in areas of common socio-political grouping—Southeast Asia for example—were aware that the United States has enough interest in one of their members to help them improve their sports image.” USIA involvement would therefore “serve to publicize this aspect of the U.S. exchange program and may possibly lead to requests from countries that have been unaware of the U.S. Specialist Coaches Program and/or have been heretofore serviced by [Communist-]bloc country coaches.”

On May 18, 1964, President Johnson received a memorandum that proposed the use of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s Syncom II satellite for a global broadcast of the events. He was informed that “the Japanese are extremely anxious to pursue the project and have continued to pressure senior officials in the Department of State.” The department therefore considered “it important for reasons of international relations that these broadcasts be made possible.” Department of Defense official Eugene G. Fubini outlined the technical difficulties of the project to National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy: “The complications . . . are obvious; there are international aspects,
congressional and commercial implications, DoD [Department of Defense] financing of networks, and possibly of the CSC [Communications Satellite Corporation].” Still, he assured Bundy, “the DoD is ready to do the job necessary provided we receive Presidential instructions to do so.”

Johnson was apparently unimpressed and initially failed to approve the initiative. Congressman Joseph Karth, the ranking member of the House Science and Astronautics Committee, opposed this perspective. According to presidential assistant Larry O’Brien, the congressman was “very disturbed at what he understands to be a White House rejection of a proposal to transmit the Olympic Games.” Entwining the broadcast with the space race against the Soviet Union, Karth “emphasized the importance of this proposal to U.S.-Japanese relations—the psychological impact this would have on maintaining the U.S. image of space supremacy.” White House aide Horace Busby then hit upon an issue that the president could not overlook. “The Olympic Games will be conducted in October at the peak of the 1964 presidential campaigns,” he informed Johnson. “The telecasts—if technically well done—would be a matter of pride for all Democratic candidates, and would also give the Administration an opportunity to identify with youth, athletics, international cooperation, et al.” The President relented, and on October 7, 1964, informed the world of the operation. “It is heartening,” he declared, “that the Olympic Games—a symbol of peaceful competition among nations—can be seen simultaneously by those actually present and by peoples throughout the entire world.”

In addition to such constructive ideas among American officials, there were more sinister schemes to “manipulate” the games. Such an opportunity presented itself when the Indonesian government denied Israeli and Taiwanese athletes entry into the country when it hosted the 1962 Asian Games. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) responded by suspending Indonesia’s membership. Indonesian President Sukarno then announced his country’s unilateral withdrawal from the Olympic movement and made plans for a rival set of competitions called the Games of the New Emerging Forces (GANEFO). In terms of American efforts to take advantage of this environment, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s vociferous support of GANEFO and its strident criticisms of the IOC sparked the imagination of those officials in the Johnson administration that paid attention to the international sports scene.

These officials were initially surprised by what seemed to be a misstep by the North Korean government. A threat to boycott the 1964 games by North Korea astonished the American embassy in Seoul given that the “regime [in Pyongyang] has put a tremendous amount of effort into securing an invitation to the Tokyo games and into building a strong team of Olympic athletes.” Far from concerning, however, the development was welcome as “it is clear that the boycott threat will have the effect of further souring North Korea’s relations with the IOC.” A proposal to exploit the situation was immediately put forward. On May 12, 1964, the U.S. ambassador to the Republic of Korea, Samuel D. Berger, sent a telegram to Secretary of State Dean Rusk recommending that American diplomats should draw the IOC’s attention to the public denigrations of it by the North Korean government. “There is a possibility,” Berger declared, “that strident and defiant tone of broadcasts may stiffen IOC’s . . . determination [to] keep North Korean GANEFO participants out of 1964 Olympics and may destroy [the] aura of cooperativeness which has heretofore characterized North Korea’s dealings with [the] IOC.”
Several days later, Rusk cabled the American Embassy in Switzerland, where the IOC was headquartered, and requested that it should make the committee aware of the North Korean rhetoric. “The IOC should have this evidence of the difficulty of persuading the North Koreans to abide by rules which are not to their liking,” he wrote. In the end, six North Korean athletes were denied entry to the Olympic village, and they subsequently left Japan before the games were opened. While it is difficult to attribute these results to U.S. diplomacy, the outcome was particularly satisfying given that North Korea’s national Olympic committee had just been accepted by the IOC. Indeed, as recently as September of 1963 IOC President Avery Brundage was strongly considering whether to recognize the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea as the peninsula’s sole representative at the 1964 games.

On the whole, U.S. officials believed that their country received a propaganda boost from the Tokyo Olympics as American athletes performed surprisingly well in the competitions. Two days before the conclusion of the games, Special Assistant Rodis wrote to Congressman Wyman that “so far we are doing very well. . . . Our team has done a job way beyond our fondest expectations. Nobody thought before the games started that we would be doing as well.” The satellite broadcast was also considered a positive accomplishment. American diplomats in Brussels, Belgium, for example, concluded that the “satellite system used during the Olympic Games has proven itself well worthwhile in the eyes of Belgian TV.” Even the U.S. Embassy in Romania, a country firmly within the Communist bloc, reported that “American successes at Tokyo seemingly made a strong impression on the sports-minded Rumanian [sic] population.”

Despite these perceptions, some members in the Johnson government recognized that reform of the country’s athletic organizations must begin if the propaganda success of the Tokyo games was to continue. Nicholas Veliotes, a U.S. diplomat in India, argued that “we did a good job here in Tokyo but the Russians still won more medals. . . . We must . . . embark on a program the next four years to build up some of the so-called minor sports.” Agreeing with this position, Congressman Robert Michel declared in a message to Johnson that “the raging controversy between the A.A.U. and the N.C.A.A. . . . will not be settled without some outside pressure and I personally feel it of such importance that you take appropriate steps to get it resolved.” “We surely want the very best team to go against the Russians,” he concluded, “and it would be tragic . . . [if our best athletes] should be denied a place on the U.S. team.”

The Kennedy administration had approached the NCAA-AAU discord through the idea of neutral arbitration. Having been disappointed by the results of this process, the Johnson administration considered other strategies. Presidential aide Bill Moyers informed a colleague that Gen. Gavin’s analysis of “a program of fund raising through a private foundation to develop better performances by U.S. athletes in international meets . . . seems to be going fairly well.” The approach was apparently much influenced by a 1960 report that Gavin had received from Great Britain titled “Sport and the Community” that advocated a combination of governmental funds and private contributions as the best means to strengthen athletic capabilities. The general’s study thus set forth a variety of recommendations that centered on a publicly funded National Amateur Sports Foundation dedicated to the grass-roots development of athletic programs.
By May of 1965 Gavin had submitted his findings to the White House. Johnson responded that “the entire field of amateur athletics and recreation requires the attention of as many interested parties and organizations as possible. How to best serve the needs of amateur athletics is, as you are well aware, a complicated problem.” “My staff,” he asserted, “is reviewing your recommendations, and will continue to do so in order that we may do everything in our power to create the greatest possible athletic opportunity for all Americans.”50 Acting on his perception of presidential encouragement, Gavin distributed the report to the USOC Board of Directors and planned to approach the editors of *Sports Illustrated* about an article on the topic. The president, though, who was distracted by other issues, preferred that the study remain confidential.51

Johnson ultimately decided against implementing the recommendations of the study and informed Gavin that he would not be able to meet with USOC officials to discuss the subject. The president, according to White House aide Jack Valenti, was “faced with [so] many pressing problems, both in the international and domestic fields . . . that there has not been the opportunity to give thought to the matter.”52 While the president’s domestic political reasons were not clearly articulated, evidence of their origins among his staff can be found in a June 21, 1965, memorandum from presidential assistant Harry McPherson to Valenti. “I don’t think we should get into this 80-year-old can of worms,” McPherson argued. While “the White House has been somehow involved before the last two U.S.-Russia meets, and famously involved before the last Olympic Games,” he continued, the “NCAA and AAU are intransigent, power-mad, and wholly self-seeking.” As such, McPherson concluded, “the President’s name should not be used to urge anything we aren’t certain to get.”53

Several members of Congress were not so hesitant. In August of 1965, the Senate Committee on Commerce, chaired by Warren G. Magnuson, held a hearing on the declining status of amateur track and field in the country. Problems in the sport were particularly salient as a number of collegiate athletes were prohibited by the NCAA from competing in that year’s dual U.S.-Soviet track meet in Kiev, Ukraine.54 In opening the hearings, Magnuson declared that “at stake, ultimately, is our continued ability to demonstrate in the Olympic Games that fitness and zest for voluntary competition are the hallmarks of a free and democratic society, in contrast to many others that compete.”55 While it was hoped, Magnuson explained, “that the parties [the NCAA and AAU] will voluntarily agree to some form of continuing arbitration,” the committee was “prepared to go even farther, even to considering legislation if necessary.”56 To preempt such intrusion, the two organizations quickly agreed to both a suspension of hostilities and an arbitration proceeding.57 Despite these prospects, however, the quarrel would not be resolved until the Amateur Sports Act was passed by Congress in 1978.58

In the meantime, the Johnson administration returned its attention to the sports programs managed by the President’s Council on Physical Fitness. On November 23, 1965, Johnson remarked that “the struggles to preserve freedom and to advance human hopes and aspirations will not be won by nations whose citizens let themselves grow soft and weak. . . . Physical fitness is therefore a matter of national concern.”59 In June of 1965, the results of a national youth fitness test were announced as demonstrating a marked increase in the fitness levels of American children (in some exercises the mean score rose by 50 percent from a 1958 study).60 Galvanized by this progress, the president announced in

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December of 1965 the creation of the Presidential Physical Fitness Award Program to address further youth fitness. “It is essential that our young people develop their physical capabilities as well as their mental skills,” Johnson stated. “Sports and other forms of active play promote good health and help provide our country with sturdy young citizens equal to the challenges of the future.”

The connection between such mass-based initiatives and elite athletics was, of course, never far from the surface. Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach accordingly wrote to Stan Musial, a consultant to the president on physical fitness, that “while I realize that physical fitness programs and competitive amateur athletics are not necessarily the same, there may be considerable overlap.” Paul Miller, an official in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, also proposed a more formal coupling of the issues. He first called for the creation of a National Physical Fitness and Sports Center within his department that “would tie the sports development program to the Great Society health, education, and welfare programs” in order to “provide a stimulus for development of significant Governmental programs in the sports and fitness areas.” Second, he suggested, like others previously, that a new National Sports Foundation “would key in on our poor Olympic performance” and, in a return to the Kennedy model, “focus public attention on the broadly-based fitness and sports development programs that should be developed at the community level throughout America.”

In March of 1968, President Johnson signed Executive Order No. 11398, which appended the words “and Sports” to the title of the President’s Council on Physical Fitness. Adding substance to this addition, the order also raised the status of the council within the federal government. Having been led until that time by the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, the vice president took over the council chairmanship. Thus empowered as a “Cabinet level group,” Johnson challenged the body to “develop national goals and programs to promote sports and fitness in America.” USOC Executive Director Arthur Lentz immediately recognized that while the president may have publicly described the effort as a means of promoting mass fitness, its true focus was on elite athletics. “With the Vice President at the head,” he stated, “we’ll move faster to improve our overall stature in Olympic competition.”

As Lentz predicted, Vice President Humphrey attempted to employ the Council as a vehicle for the revitalization of the country’s Olympic stature. “I want to see a great national competition, from the smallest hamlet to the biggest city,” he stated. “We want to see greater support for our athletes in international competition.” Recognizing that “the great athletes aren’t going to come out of penthouse apartments,” he felt that success in elite sport depended upon an effort “to develop the youth of our inner cities and our rural areas.” Nevertheless, the federal government could not, according to his ideas, take too active a role given its limited resources and jurisdiction. “But we can,” Humphrey reminded, “get local government and private groups working together.” Recognizing the greater resources for his organization, Lentz professed that “it’s the kind of federal support we’ve been looking for. . . . I’d like to see us build Olympic training centers all over the country. We need government help to build these new facilities.”

By 1965 the State Department had also become increasingly aware of the potential of athletics to stimulate cultural contacts with other peoples. In September of that year, the department released a study on the subject with an announcement that “United States
foreign policy objectives can be achieved to some extent through the medium of sports.” After analyzing the past successes and problems of U.S. athletic initiatives abroad, it concluded that “a. most of the world is ‘sports-conscious’; b. [t]hat athletic activities are the least suspicious approach to youth; c. [and t]hat in some countries sports bear a close relationship to politics.” The implications of these findings for American foreign policy were clear. In Africa, for example, “because athletics enjoys [sic] a prime position . . . public opinion of other nations in the area of sports becomes generalized into public opinion of other nations themselves.”68

While the report was the first in-house elucidation of the use of sport in American diplomacy, the State Department had for years been sending athletes overseas as cultural ambassadors.69 With an annual budget of approximately $250,000, approximately ten athletic groups were sent abroad each year from 1963 to 1967.70 These teams put on public exhibitions that highlighted the skill of American athletes. While such demonstrations of the nation’s athletic superiority were important, the department was equally interested in workshops for local teams. “These groups,” according to Rodis, “visit schools in out-of-the-way places, affording a maximum of contact between American athletes and their host country counterparts.”71 U.S. officials stationed abroad repeatedly cited the visits as among the most successful methods through which contacts with local populations could be established. A Latin-American tour by an AAU All-Star basketball team prompted Charles Meyer, a diplomat at the U.S. Embassy in Panama to write, for example, that “from the viewpoint of meeting country objectives and reaching target audiences, the visit of the . . . Basketball Team to Panama was the most effective cultural presentation which has been sent to the post during the past four years.”72

U.S. officials also believed that American teams could also be used to undermine the Soviet grip on its Eastern-bloc satellites. The 1965 study declared, for instance, that “many Poles want the United States to defeat the Soviet and are emotionally upset over any U.S. loss to the Soviet [sic].”73 The American Legation in Budapest, Hungary, likewise reported that spectator sentiment at the 1965 World University Games was decidedly pro-American. “Although the United States is participating in the . . . [games] with one of the smallest delegations,” the Legation described, “every American victory is greeted by an ovation out of proportion to those accorded other teams.” More significantly, “there has been not only a noticeable coolness towards Soviet victories, amounting to only polite recognition of the fact, but an undercurrent of hostility on occasion.” Such sentiments were loudly pronounced by the approximately 10,000 Hungarian spectators who watched the U.S. college basketball team defeat its Soviet opponent. Chants of “Go, go, USA” were roared over and over as the Americans increased their lead. The Soviets, on the other hand, were greeted with “cat-calls and derisive howls” at every turn.74

Athletic coaches also visited foreign nations under the Department of State’s American Specialists program.75 In fiscal year 1966, fifty-seven sports specialists traveled overseas.76 Amongst them, Joey Bouchard, a physical education instructor at a small college in Maine, spent seventy-nine days in Mali during which he conducted clinics in four different cities. As a result, the U.S. Embassy in the Malian capital expressed its belief “that year-long association between Americans and Malians could produce not only good basketball, but good personal relationships between Embassy personnel and Malian govern-
ment officials.” U.S. officials in Tehran also described basketball coach Donald Linehan’s stay in Iran as a coup for America’s relationship with the country. “Coach Linehan’s tour was extremely worthwhile,” they declared. “He . . . faced a number of problems far removed from the basketball court with concern, skill and, we feel, a degree of long-term success.”

Despite the assumption of foreign enthusiasm for visits by American sportsmen, the number of athletic tours abroad began to decline in the late 1960s along with a general deemphasis of cultural programs in the State Department. The resources afforded to these undertakings had been under threat since at least 1964, when Congress began to contemplate a reduction in the appropriations directed toward the department’s cultural exchange initiatives. J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, wrote to President Johnson in May of that year expressing “deep concern over the current financial prospects and future status of our official educational and cultural exchange program.” Plans to decrease funding, he continued, “make it clear that the exchange program is facing a critical juncture in its history. . . . This outcome would have a significance going far beyond the actual amount of money involved.” Johnson agreed, writing to Senator John McClellan that “it would be a mistake for a program of this quality to be drastically curtailed at this time.”

As time went on, though, the federal government became distracted by issues that required more immediate impacts than the cultural programs could provide. The House Appropriations Committee thus stated in its report on the 1969 appropriation bill that “this [cultural exchange program] was an area in which substantial reductions could be made in view of the present financial situation.” In 1968, the Republican Party, in an ironic twist to its traditional conservatism towards government expenditures, chastised the Johnson administration for its short-sightedness in regards to overseas cultural initiatives. A draft declaration received by the White House from the Republican Coordinating Committee’s Task Force on the Conduct of Foreign Relations claimed that “it is our Party that originated this nation’s first concerted overseas information policy and program, and it is Republicans who have consistently called for major improvements in this critical field. We now call for still greater efforts.” Lamenting the “tarnished American image” abroad, it argued for a reorganization of the country’s foreign activities so that “long-range educational and cultural programs, which need far greater emphasis, should be transferred from the Department of State to USIA.” “It is evident therefore . . .,” the statement concluded, “that the current administration is unwilling or incapable of performing responsibly and imaginatively in this as in so many other areas critical to the well-being and security of the United States.”

While government officials were confident in their ability to deflect such criticisms, fiscal year 1968 saw the State Department’s budget for sports reduced by 42 percent from the previous year to $160,000; in 1969, it was reduced again to $120,000. Indeed, the budget for the entire cultural presentations program was by fiscal year 1969 less than half of what it had been just five years earlier. Highlighting the effects of these reductions in February of 1968, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Jacob Canter was forced to deny a request by Glenn Ferguson, the U.S. ambassador in Nairobi, of a sports tour for Kenya. Despite the “ample evidence that our athletic personalities have enjoyed a large measure of
success abroad . . ,” he lamented that “we are not able to program more people in this field.” This was particularly true for Ferguson’s post in that “African countries are relatively poor, [so that] there is usually insufficient local money to induce or provide for visits.” By the time President Johnson left office, the cultural program under which sport tours were provided had become so limited as to cause a State Department analysis to conclude, “The effect of the FY 1969 budget reductions has been to retain a skeleton program with little flesh on the bone.”

Whatever the diminishing resources for its cultural programs, the Johnson-era State Department, perhaps drawing on the perceived successes of the Tokyo games, recognized the prospective value of the 1968 Mexico City Olympics for American prestige. In February of 1967, the Mexico City Olympic Organizing Committee publicly announced that a cultural exhibition would be used as a counterpart to the athletic competitions. Fearful that the Soviet Union would utilize the exhibition to undermine American influence, U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Fulton Freeman expounded upon the need for an outstanding cultural presentation. A later decision by Cuba to send a large entourage exacerbated this perception. Freeman therefore envisioned that the State Department and USIA could contribute by coordinating art, history, folklore, film, nuclear, and space displays of sufficient quality as to compete with the Communist-bloc attractions. President Johnson even expressed interest, declaring that “the revival of the cultural phase of the Olympiad is a significant occurrence. . . . I want to express America’s delight in being able to take part, with other nations of the world, in a great cultural event. May it bring to us all a new understanding of the meaning of the Olympic spirit.”

Because the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs had limited funds for the initiative, a series of inter-agency meetings were held among officials from the USIA, NASA, the Atomic Energy Commission, and the Smithsonian Institution. In early September of 1968, State Department official Asbury Coward traveled to a USOC Board of Directors meeting in Chicago in order to relay the government’s plans. Stating that “I don’t think anybody envisioned either the dimensions of it [the cultural event] or the importance the Mexicans were going to attach to it,” he went on to describe an ambitious proposal that was “a pretty major operation.” The variety of attractions eventually pleased Freeman. “What was accomplished,” he wrote to Washington, “was, considering the limitation of funds, good, and permitted the U.S. to participate to a far greater extent than original pessimist estimates indicated.” Indeed, he went on, “the four cultural presentations completely funded by the Department were of high, if not top quality, and performed well.”

The United States also sent several coaches to Mexico to frustrate similar efforts by its enemies. On May 21, 1966, Ambassador Freeman sent an urgent telegram to Washington requesting an initiative to “counteract increased Communist Bloc country penetration in the Mexican Olympic Committee sports program.” Nine coaches from the Communist world were already working in Mexico, he warned; seven more were expected in the near future. An effort by the State Department to provide American coaches would be “interpreted as an expression of goodwill; it would show the value of close cultural ties with the United States; and would significantly enhance the U.S. image.” Upon learning of the plan, Gen. José de J. Clark Flores, president of the Mexican Olympic Commit-
tee, replied that “there is no doubt that the North American coaches will make a great contribution to our sports future and I want to take this opportunity to express to you and to them our recognition of the interest they have shown in helping our athletes.”99 The fruits of the coaches’ labors impressed Freeman. “The work of the U.S. coaches,” he wrote, “would appear to have been extraordinarily productive, and results exceeded best expectations.”100

Not all went so well for the United States at the Mexico City Olympic games, however. During the Cold War, African-American athletes were seen as useful counterweights to the Soviet Union’s criticism of the racial divide in the United States. An American victory in the 1964 U.S.-Soviet dual track and field meet by an all-black team prompted Department of Labor official John W. Leslie to write to the White House, for instance, that “in view of the headlines on racial strife, it would seem to me an appropriate action for the president to call in this biracial group of American athletes who, working together, beat the Soviet Union rather than each other in the streets.”101 Throughout the 1960s, however, an undercurrent of dissent—of which athletes were not immune—had been building among African Americans in protest to the racial situation in their country. Indeed, a number of black sports stars became leaders in the movement for equality.102

Protests by African Americans were particularly sensitive for the Johnson presidency, which fashioned itself as the most progressive administration in American history in terms of the advancement of minority rights. By 1968, heavyweight champion boxer Cassius Clay had become anathema to many white Americans and a hero to those in the Civil Rights movement. Renaming himself Muhammad Ali in accordance with Islamic tradition, Clay refused to be inducted into the armed forces on April 28, 1967, and was subsequently convicted of the knowing and willful avoidance of military service.103 Having registered as a conscientious objector, he described a mixture of racial injustices and religious convictions that informed his decision. “I’m expected to go overseas to help free people in South Vietnam,” Ali asserted, “and at the same time my people [African Americans] here are being brutalized and mistreated, and this is really the same thing that’s happening over in Vietnam.” Additionally, “Freedom means being able to follow your religion. . . . Whatever the punishment, whatever the persecution is for standing up for my beliefs, even if it means facing machine-gun fire that day, I’ll face it before denouncing Elijah Muhammad and the religion of Islam.”104

Inspired by Ali’s condemnation of the Vietnam War, interest grew among black athletes regarding a boycott of the 1968 Olympic games. Harry Edwards, a professor of sociology at San Jose State College, became the leader of this movement—which became known as the “Olympic Project for Human Rights.”105 It had, according to Edwards, four major objectives: first, to stage a major international demonstration against discrimination in the United States; second, to expose the use of African-American athletes as instruments of political propaganda; third, to establish a connection between black athletes and the wider African-American community; and fourth, to educate the African-American community to the costs of unthinking involvement in the white-dominated athletic system.106 In a more specific set of demands, Edwards called for the removal of IOC President Avery Brundage, whom he believed was a racist, the banishment of South Africa and Northern Rhodesia from the Olympic Movement, and the reinstatement of Ali as the
world heavyweight boxing champion. Edwards proclaimed that the oppression of blacks in the United States was equal to that found in South Africa. He thus said, “America has to be exposed for what it is.”

After learning of the boycott proposal, USOC President Douglas Roby condemned Edwards as a self-serving obstacle to the Olympic ideal. “The fellow that’s heading this . . .,” he told the USOC Board of Directors, “is making a strenuous effort to attract attention to himself, and he is sort of a rabble rouser and he is trying to create a scene and he is looking for a vehicle and direct attention to himself.” The Johnson administration was also concerned by the matter. Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs official Asbury Coward personally discussed the situation with former black Olympians and supported the idea of allowing an African American on the USOC Board of Directors. Vice President Humphrey also took action by using the Council on Physical Fitness and Sports as an instrument to obtain appointments for African Americans in the nation’s sport organizations—and particularly in the Olympic movement. The USOC, on the other hand, decided to take a “wait-and-see” approach. As put by Roby in reference to the possible inclusion of an African American in the USOC managerial team, “I’d hate to see a man put on the Board just because his skin was dark.”

The boycott movement in the United States was joined to a larger protest when South Africa was readmitted into the Olympic movement in the spring of 1968. Edwards retorted that the IOC “virtually said the hell with us. Now we’ll have to reply let Whitey run his own Olympics.” In a statement given to the American Committee on Africa, he announced, “I am deeply opposed to the presence of South Africans or Southern Rhodesians as team members . . . at international sporting events. . . . Black athletes will refuse to participate in the Olympic Games if [the two countries] . . . are permitted into the Games while racism still exists at any level.” Tommie Smith, a world-record sprinter at San Jose State added that the situation was “lousy” so that “you cannot rule out the possibility that we Negro athletes might boycott the games.” Eager to win points in the developing world, Soviet officials condemned IOC President Brundage, who was American, for “juggling facts” in “the unsavory role of defender of the racists.” After the Mexican government, which was worried about the effects of a successful boycott, called for an emergency meeting on the situation, the IOC gave in by voting to expel South Africa from the Olympics in April of 1968.

The somewhat mollified American athletes altered their initial plans for a boycott in favor of a symbolic protest at the games. During the Olympic victory ceremony for the 200-meter sprint on October 25, 1968, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, the American gold and bronze medalists, raised their fists in a black power salute as the American national anthem was played and the national flag was hoisted. Smith later described the symbolism that he and Carlos ascribed to the demonstration to Howard Cosell, a popular sports personality at the American Broadcasting Company (ABC):

My raised right hand stood for the power in black America. Carlos’ raised left hand stood for the unity of black America. Together they formed an arch of unity and power. The black scarf around my neck stood for black pride. The black socks with no shoes stood for black poverty in racist America. The totality of our effort was the regaining of black dignity.
Jesse Owens, who was the country’s most famous black Olympian, described the discontent that gave rise to the protest in a February 1969 presentation to the USOC Board of Directors. “White America,” he stated, “has a tendency to sometimes want to sweep it [racial exclusion] under the rug, and we sometimes feel that we should let it go away.” African Americans, he continued, “love the Olympic movement. . . . [but ask] why can’t we become a greater force and a greater part of this beloved Olympic Movement in our country.”

In Mexico City, Smith and Carlos’ gesture was opposed by the governing bodies of the Olympic movement. The IOC immediately informed the USOC that the sprinters should receive prompt disciplinary punishment for their “political” action. While the USOC initially preferred to issue a minor warning, the IOC insisted that an immediate expulsion of the two sprinters from the competitions was the minimum requirement in order for the entire American team to avoid suspension. The USOC Executive Committee subsequently conceded and asked Smith and Carlos to leave Mexico. Tensions between the USOC and nation’s athletes grew when several Olympians, after learning of the penalties, announced that they would refuse to compete. Leon Coleman, an African-American hurdler from Boston, for example, insisted that “we’re pretty much agreed if one of us goes home, everybody’ll go home.” In the end, though, Smith and Carlos convinced their counterparts to continue, and the events concluded with only one additional—and rather small—American demonstration.

Initial press reports also indicated that the U.S. government was involved in seeking harsh measures for the runners. In contrast to such rumors, the U.S. Embassy in Mexico actually warned USOC officials against overreaction and expressed a desire that Smith and Carlos should be allowed to remain in the country. At the White House, National Security Advisor Walt Rostow was informed of the situation and received notice that the Embassy was prepared to intervene if tensions between black Olympians and the USOC threatened the prestige of the United States. Although no such action was taken, these fears were confirmed when several Latin American Olympic delegations condemned the protest as an instance of disrespect to Mexico. Puerto Rican official Felicio Torregrosa stated after the episode, for instance, that “it is hard for Latin Americans to understand the attitude of the Negro athletes because in our countries we do not have . . . [such] racial conditions. But, regardless . . . politics should not be brought into the Olympic Games.” Soviet track coach Gabriel Korobkov—not surprisingly—drew attention to the situation with an assertion that “it’s too bad. They are supposed to be free people. . . . It wouldn’t happen to us. We don’t mix sports and politics.”

In the end, the Johnson administration could do little in the realm of athletics to counteract Smith and Carlos’ symbolic demonstration. The lone exception was an attempt to publicize the president’s meeting with George Foreman, a black gold medalist boxer at the 1968 games. Foreman was an attractive image for the White House both because he was a product of the administration’s Job Corps program and because he had loudly broadcast his patriotism in Mexico. In his proposal that Johnson should meet Foreman, Office of Economic Opportunity Director Bill Kelly asserted that “instead of clenching his fist in protest at Mexico City, George waved an American flag in the ring after he had beaten the Russian in the second round.” Moreover, “as the world listened to
our National Anthem, George sang [while receiving his medal] ‘The Star Spangled Banner’ loud and clear . . . and he referred to his victory over the Russian as ‘United States Power.’”129

The 1968 Olympics thus exemplified the ambivalent nature of federal sport policy during the Lyndon B. Johnson presidential years. On the one hand, the U.S. government attempted to reinforce its image abroad by providing coaches to Mexico and by participating in a cultural exhibition at the games. The positive effects of these initiatives were somewhat dampened, however, when several minority athletes at the competitions actively protested the shortcomings of the Johnson administration. These results, of course, partly reflected the uncertain nature of sport in 1960s American culture. While governmental officials believed that competitiveness in international athletics served as a demonstration of national vitality, others held a different, less jingoistic point of view.

The president himself vacillated between advocacy of efforts designed to enhance American efforts in elite competitions and support for programs geared towards broad participation and national fitness. Torn between such seemingly contradictory goals, the Johnson administration, in the end, failed to address either adequately. As a result, proposals such as the National Amateur Sports Foundation were never implemented. Whatever the failings of the Johnson administration, it is, of course, easy to exaggerate the significance of sport to American policymakers. Still, the waging of the Cold War at cultural—as well as political and economic—levels endowed international athletics with a unique degree of importance for government officials. Rightly or wrongly, sport was perceived as an instrument for both the promotion of American interests and the negation of countervailing strategies on the part of the country’s enemies.  

1“Counter-force” was the term used in George Kennan’s original “X” article on containment in the influential journal Foreign Affairs. See “X” [George F. Kennan], “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” Foreign Affairs 25 (1947): 576. The entire document can be found on pages 566-582. Kennan later included cultural contacts in his prescriptions: “I personally attach . . . high importance to cultural contact as a means of combating the negative impressions about this country that mark so much of world opinion.” Kennan address given at the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, May 12, 1955, quoted in Yale Richmond, “[Commentary] Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: How the Arts Influenced Policy,” Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society 35 (2005): 239. The increasing notice of the cultural Cold War among diplomatic historians led to a special issue of the Journal of Cold War Studies on the topic. See volume 4, number 1 (2002), which focuses on “high culture.” See also two articles in the journal’s subsequent issue: volume 4, number 2 (2002). They are Tony Shaw, “Martyrs, Miracles, and Martians: Religion and Cold War Cinematic Propaganda in the 1950s” (pp. 3-22), and the review essay on propaganda efforts in the Cold War by Kenneth A. Osgood, entitled “Hearts and Minds: The Unconventional Cold War” (pp. 85-107). The best book-length study of the cultural Cold War is David Caute, The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). No mention of sport is made, however.


Telephone conversation, Robert Kennedy with Lyndon B. Johnson, 28 May 1964, Tape: WH6405.11, Program No. 9, Citation No.: 3539, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum, Austin, Texas (hereafter LBJL).

Hubert H. Humphrey, untitled document, n.d., folder 14, box 92, series 3, Group II, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Historical Collection, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas (hereafter CU).


Hubert H. Humphrey to Lyndon B. Johnson, 14 January 1964, File RE 13 11/22/63-9/30/64, box 4, Gen. RE 10, Subject File, White House Central File (hereafter WHCF), LBJL.

Kenneth Wilson to Nicholas Rodis, 30 April 1964, folder 12, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU.


The Committee was created on August 13, 1963, by Executive Order 11117. It is published in Federal Register 28, Executive Order no. 11117, 13 August 1963, 8397-8398.

For a description of these different interests and programs, see Report of the Interagency Committee on International Athletics, Appendix D—Relationship of Participating Federal Departments and Agencies to the Committee, n.d. [c. August 1965], folder 17, box 89, series 3, Group II, CU. The Peace Corps, for example, ran an athletic program separate from that of the State Department. See Raymond A. Ciszek, “[Of Major Interest] Majors to the Corps,” Journal of Health, Physical Education and Recreation 35 (1964): 77-78.

Nicholas Rodis to Kenneth L. Wilson, 4 December 1963, folder 19, box 87, series 3, Group II, CU.

According to Arthur D. Little employee Warren S. Berg, the company was “very much interested in a proposed study or survey of the United States Olympic situation.” The meeting is mentioned in Warren S. Berg [an Arthur D. Little employee] to [Assistant to the President] Kenneth P. O’Donnell, 11 February 1964, File RE 13 Olympic Games 11/22/63-3/31/64, box 5, Gen RE 10, Subject File, WHCF. Berg’s remarks are also quoted from this document.


A recording of this conversation was made: Office conversation, Robert F. Kennedy and James Gavin with President Johnson, 12 June 1964, Tape: WH6406.07, Program No. 16, Citation No. 3717, LBJL. Unfortunately, the quality of the recording is so poor as to render any analysis of its content virtually impossible.

Lyndon B. Johnson to James Gavin, 15 July 1964, Folder “Gavin, James M.,” box 60, Name File, WHCF.

Kenneth Wilson to Nicholas Rodis, 30 April 1964, folder 12, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU.

William P. Bundy memorandum to [Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs official] Lucius D. Battle, 10 April 1964, folder 12, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU. Emphasis added.

Rowan message to all USIA posts, 8 June 1964, folder 12, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU.

Memorandum, Martin M. McLaughlin to Nicholas Rodis, 27 May 1964, folder 12, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU.
28 Memorandum, Nicholas Rodis to Martin M. McLaughlin, 2 June 1964, folder 12, box 90, CU. For a description of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs’s athletic programs, see Administrative History of the Department of State, vol. 1, chap. 12, pp. 47-54, box 4, LBJL. For the Soviet efforts to which Rodis was referring, see Peppard and Riordan, Playing Politics.


31 Memorandum, O’Brien to the President, 27 May 1964, Folder RE 13 11/22/63-9/30/64, box 4, Gen. RE 10, Subject File, WHCF. Johnson’s decision that the effort was not worthwhile occurred in a meeting with McGeorge Bundy on May 19, 1964. See Memorandum, Kermit Gordon to the President, 5 June 1964, File Japan memos [1 of 2] vol. 2 5/64-11/64, box 250, Country File, National Security File, LBJL. This document also describes Karth’s position while arguing against the expenditure.

32 Memorandum, Horace Busby to the President, 2 June 1964, Folder RE 13 11/22/63-9/30/64, box 4, Gen. RE 10, Subject File, WHCF. Italics underlined in original.


35 Seoul Embassy airgram to Department of State, 4 September 1964, Folder Edu. 15-1, box 360, Record Group 59, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland (hereafter NARA).

36 Telegram, [Samuel D.] Berger to [Dean] Rusk, 12 May 1964, folder 12, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU.


38 See Findling and Pelle, Encyclopedia of the Modern Olympic Movement, 169. The Department of State was informed of the North Koreans’ departure in American Embassy in Tokyo to Ruehr/SecState, 9 October 1964, Folder Edu 15-1 (10/6/64), box 366, Record Group 59, NARA. The North Korean track and field team was also suspended from the 1968 Mexico City Olympics after it participated in the Second GANEFO of winter 1966. See Allen Guttmann, The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 110.

39 The International Olympic Committee (IOC) initially offered provisional recognition of the North Korean National Olympic Committee in 1962 with the stipulation that there should be a joint North and South Korean team. The IOC subsequently granted full membership to the North Koreans after the South Koreans balked. See Richard Espy, The Politics of the Olympic Games (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 82-83; Guttmann, Olympics, 110; Alfred Érich Senn, Power, Politics, and the Olympic Games (Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics, 1999), 132.

40 See “Status of Korea in the International Olympic Committee as of October 8, 1963,” folder 11, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU; Guttmann, Olympics, 110.

41 Nicholas Rodis to Louis [C.] Wyman, 22 October 1964, folder 8, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU. A late surge by the Soviet Union pushed its total medal count ahead of that of the United States, but American officials were galvanized by a lead of six in the critically important gold medals. The official 1964 medal count is available online at the IOC website: http://www.olympic.org/uk/games/past/index.uk.asp?OLGT=1&OLGY=1964 [22 July 2006].

42 American Embassy in Brussels, Belgium to Department of State, 18 December 1964, folder 14, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU.
Airgram, American Embassy in Bucharest, Romania to Department of State, 27 November 1964, folder 14, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU.

Nicholas Veliotes to Nicholas Rodis, 26 October 1964, folder 8, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU.


Nicholas Veliotes to Nicholas Rodis, 26 October 1964, folder 8, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU.


Toward a More Effective United States Olympic Effort (Cambridge, Mass.: Arthur D. Little, Inc., 1965). This key document is available at the Amateur Athletic Sports Library, Los Angeles, California. Appendix C focuses on the proposed National Amateur Sports Foundation. For an early elaboration of the foundation that is perceptive and concise, see President’s Council on Physical Fitness, untitled report, n.d., folder 15, box 91, series 3, Group II, CU.

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President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Administrative History (pp. 22-24), Administrative Histories File, LBJL. Results of the 1965 study are summarized in Paul A. Hunsicker and Guy G.


62 Nicholas Katzenbach to Stan Musial, 10 January 1966, folder 15, box 91, series 3, Group II, CU.

63 Miller’s plan is articulated in Stan Ross memorandum to Joe Califano, 17 November 1967, Folder 165-11 “President’s Council on Physical Fitness,” box 31, Confidential File, WHCF.

64 President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, Executive Order 11398, 4 March 1968, published in *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, Volume 4* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), 435-436. See also President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Administrative History, pp. 1-2, Administrative Histories File, LBJL. The roots of this re-designation are found in Dean F. Markham to Larry O’Brien, 2 April 1964, Folder RE 13 “Olympic Games 4/1/64-10/31/64,” box 5, Gen RE 10, Subject File, WHCF. Markham states, “Another possibility that might be considered would be redesignating [sic] the Fitness Council to include some emphasis and attention towards sports so that it could be set up as the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Development.”


67 Humphrey and Lentz quoted in ibid.

68 “A Study of the Impact of Sports on the Achievement of U.S. Foreign Policy Objectives,” n.d. [c. September 1965], folder 17, box 89, series 3, Group II, CU. Nicholas Rodis, the Special Assistant for Athletic Programs in the State Department, publicly articulated the connection between sport and American foreign policy in Nicholas Rodis, “The State Department’s Athletes Give a New Look to Foreign Policy,” *Amateur Athlete*, August 1964, pp. 18-19, 36. See also [Deputy Special Assistant for Athletic Programs, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, State Department] Alfred E. Smith, “American Athletes Win Friends for U.S.,” *Department of State News Letter*, December 1966, clipping of a reprint of this article in folder 20, box 89, series 3, Group II, CU. The year 1965 also saw a report produced by the Interagency Committee on International Athletics. While the whole report could not be found by the author, drafts of several pieces of it can be found in folder 17, box 89, series 3, Group II, CU. Appendix C is particularly helpful for the relationship between sport and diplomacy in that it contains selected extracts from reports by American posts abroad on the impact of athletics on relations with host countries.

69 This was part of a larger cultural exchange program that also included intellectuals and performing artists. See Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003). The Department’s Cultural Presentations Program (which sponsored these athletic tours) began in 1954 under the auspices of the President’s Emergency Fund for International Affairs and continued on a permanent basis under congressional legislation: *An Act: To Provide for the Promotion and Strengthening of International Relations through Cultural and Athletic Exchanges and Participation in International Fairs and Festivals*, Public Law 84-860/Chapter 811, 84th Cong., 2nd sess., 1956. It was codified at *Statutes at Large* 70, 778-780 (1956). In 1961, the Fulbright-Hays Act became the legislative authority for such tours: *An Act: To Provide for the Improvement and Strengthening of the International Relations of the United States by Promoting Better Mutual Understanding Among the Peoples of the World through Educational and Cultural Exchanges*, Public Law 87-256, 87th Cong., 1st sess., 1961. It was codified at *Statutes at Large* 75, 527-538 (1961).
Administrative History of the Department of State, vol. 1, chap. 12, p. 52, box 4, LBJL. See endnote 33 above for further citation information.

Rodis, “The State Department’s Athletes Give a New Look to Foreign Policy,” p. 18.

American Embassy in Panama to Department of State, 31 August 1965, folder 21, box 87, series 3, Group II, CU. Such beliefs were repeatedly expressed by American posts abroad in the wake of athletic tours. The American Consulate in Aleppo, Syria rated a visit by an AAU swimming team as “an unqualified success” in a telegram to Department of State, 14 July 1966, folder 22, box 87, series 3, Group II, CU. For a selection (which is by no means comprehensive) of similar analyses of this and other tours, see American Embassy in Algiers, Algeria to Department of State, 27 July 1966, folder 22, box 87, series 3, Group II, CU; American Embassy in Tunis, Tunisia to Department of State, 23 June 1966, folder 22, box 87, series 3, Group II, CU; American Embassy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to Department of State, 20 July 1966, folder 23, box 87, series 3, Group II, CU.

Quoted from “A Study of the Impact of Sports on the Achievement of U.S. Foreign Policy Objectives.” For further elaboration of the U.S.-Polish athletic relationship, see American Embassy in Warsaw to Department of State, 1 August 1968, folder 16, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU. It asserts that in a meeting with the Embassy’s cultural affairs officer Leonard Grzeskowia, Secretary-General of the Polish Olympic Committee, “spoke very highly of past US-Polish cooperation in sports and expressed a strong desire to see this cooperation continue.”

American Legation in Budapest to Department of State, 29 August 1965, folder 11, box 93, series 3, Group II, CU. See also American Legation in Budapest to Department of State, 2 September 1965, folder 11, box 93, series 3, Group II, CU.

Authors, judges, professors, actors, artists, and many other professions also took part in the Specialists Program. For a review of U.S. coaches under the program from 1963 through 1969, see J. Manuel Espinosa memorandum to Jerrold B. Speers, 18 December 1969, folder 25, box 88, series 3, Group II, CU.

Review of Advisory Panel for International Athletics meeting, 16 January 1967, by U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Athletic Exchanges Staff, folder 17, box 89, series 3, Group II, CU.

American Embassy in Bamako, Mali to Department of State, 19 September 1966, folder 25, box 88, series 3, Group II, CU.

American Embassy in Tehran to Department of State, 9 January 1968, folder 24, box 88, series 3, Group II, CU.

For the 1964 hearings on appropriations for the State Department, see U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Appropriations, Hearing, Departments of State, Justice, and Commerce, the Judiciary, and Related Agencies Appropriations, 1965. Part 1, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., 1964; U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, House Subcommittee on Departments of State, and Commerce, the Judiciary, and Related Agencies Appropriations, Hearing, Departments of State, Justice, and Commerce, the Judiciary, and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1965, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., 1964. For a succinct analysis of the issues relating to the appropriations, see “Memorandum Concerning Appropriations for Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Activities,” Folder “Cultural Exchanges,” box 8, Subject File, National Security File, LBJL.


Lyndon B. Johnson to John McClellan, 12 June 1964, Folder “Cultural Exchanges,” box 8, Subject File, National Security File, LBJL.

U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, House Committee on Appropriations, Report, Departments of State, Justice, and Commerce, the Judiciary, and Related Agencies Appropriation Bill, Fiscal Year 1969. Report [To accompany H.R. — ], 90th Cong., 2nd sess., 1968, p. 8. Secretary of State Dean Rusk, however, asserted that Vietnam, for instance, never detracted from the State Department’s attention to other areas. See transcript, Dean Rusk Oral History Interview IV, 3/8/70, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, p. 1, LBJL. George Ball, undersecretary of state until 1966 (he was also appointed U.S. Ambassa-
dor to the United Nations in 1968), disagreed with Rusk on this point. See Transcript, George Ball Oral History Interview II, 7/9/71, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, p. 11, LBJL.


84In terms of averting Republican denigration USIA official Leonard H. Marks stated, for example, “If attacks are made as reflected above . . . we are on secure ground.” Memorandum for the President through White House official Charles Maguire, 31 January 1968, Folder “FG 296 U.S. Information Agency (1967-),” box 33, Confidential File, WHCF. Budget figures from Administrative History of the Department of State, p. 52.

85See Administrative History of the Department of State, p. 51. The FY 1969 budget was $1.2 million.

86Jacob Canter to Glenn Ferguson, 12 February 1968, folder 37, box 92, series 3, Group II, CU.


89Memorandum of Conversation, 28 June 1967, folder 19, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU.

90American Embassy in Mexico to Department of State, 30 January 1968, folder 20, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU.

91American Embassy in Mexico to Department of State, 7 March 1967, folder 19, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU. See also memorandum for the files regarding “CU Assistance to Mexican Olympic Preparations,” 23 February 1967, folder 15, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU.

92White House Press Release, 8 July 1968, Folder “RE 13 10/1/64-,” box 4, Gen RE 10, Subject File, WHCF.

93Memorandum, J. Manuel Espinosa to Jean Joyce, 28 October 1968, folder 19, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU. This document can also be found in folder 15, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU.


95On the American displays, see memorandum, J. Manuel Espinosa to Jean Joyce, 28 October 1968, folder 19, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU. This document can also be found in folder 15, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU.

96American Embassy in Mexico to Department of State, 18 November 1968, folder 19, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU. For the effort by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs on behalf of the Cultural Olympics, see also Administrative History of the Department of State, pp. 51-52, 71.


98American Embassy in Mexico to Department of State, 21 May 1966, folder 21, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU. The estimated number of Eastern-bloc coaches grew to twenty by July of 1966. See memorandum of conversation, American Embassy in Mexico, D.F., 1 July 1966, folder 21, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU.
3, Group II, CU. Freeman also noted in American Embassy in Mexico to Department of State, 7 September 1966, that “the Embassy feels that improved contacts between the Mexican and American sporting communities can greatly contribute to the continued good relations between the Mexican and American peoples.” Found in folder 21, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU.

99 Flores quoted in USIS Mexico to USIA Washington, D.C., 31 May 1966, folder 21, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU.

100 American Embassy in Mexico to Department of State, 18 November 1968, folder 19, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU.

101 Memorandum, John W. Leslie to George Reedy, 27 July 1964, Folder RE 21 “Track & Field Meets,” box 5, Gen RE 13, Subject File, WHCF.


106 See Edwards in Levine, American Sport, 136.


109 Roby quoted from Proceedings of Meeting of the Board of Directors of the United States Olympic Committee, 16/17 December 1967 (USOC Minutes 16-17 December 16-17 1967), p. 8, USOCCL.

110 Coward’s actions discussed in Charles Frankel to Nicholas Katzenbach, 14 December 1967, folder 30, box 89, series 3, Group II, CU.


113 Olympic Boycotts,” Christian Science Monitor, 29 February 1968, p. 16. A clipping of this article was found in folder 20, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU.


USOC President Roby stated, “I asked them [the IOC] what they would do if we would not take action. They said they might be forced to pull the entire United States team out of the Olympics.” Quoted in “Suspend 2 Negro Olympians,” *Chicago Tribune*, 19 October 1968, sec. A, p. 1.

These decisions were related in American Embassy in Mexico to Secretary of State, 18 October 1968, folder 18, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU. There were also reports that the Mexican government insisted that Smith and Carlos leave the country. An excellent contemporaneous account of the protest and its aftermath is provided in Charles Maher, “U.S. Expels Smith, Carlos from Olympic Team,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 October 1968, sec. A, pp. 1, 3.

Coleman also felt that even the white athletes would join in the pullout. This belief—as well as Coleman’s quotation—comes from “Negro Airs Possibility of Pullout,” *Washington Post*, 19 October 1968, sec. C, p. 2.

The protests were: Bob Beamon wore black socks to the victory ceremony after winning the gold medal in the long jump; long jump bronze medalist Ralph Boston received his award in bare feet; and American sprinters Lee Evans, Larry James, and Ron Freeman, who swept the 400-meter sprint, wore black berets (which they removed during the playing of the national anthem) on the victory podium. See Maher, “U.S. Expels Smith, Carlos from Olympic Team.” This article also references Carlos’ successful attempt to persuade Evans to continue competing at the games. A helpful—though unpublished—work that addresses the 1968 protests is Kevin B. Witherspoon, “Protest at the Pyramid: The 1968 Mexico City Olympics and the Politicization of the Olympic Games” (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 2003).

On October 19, 1968, the State Department denied these rumors, for example, and asserted, “We are not involved in any way. We know nothing about it.” See “Reaction to Expulsion Runs Gamut,” *Washington Post*, 19 October 1968, sec. C, p. 2.

Freeman’s view is expressed in two cables, both of which were sent on October 18, 1968 (one of which is cited in note 141): Both cited as American Embassy in Mexico to Secretary of State, 18 October 1968, folder 18, box 90, series 3, Group II, CU.

Memorandum, Benjamin H. Read to Walt W. Rostow, 18 October 1968, Folder “RE 13 Olympic Games (Pan American Games),” box 85, Confidential File, WHCF.

Torregrosa and Korobkov quoted in “Reaction to Expulsion Runs Gamut.”