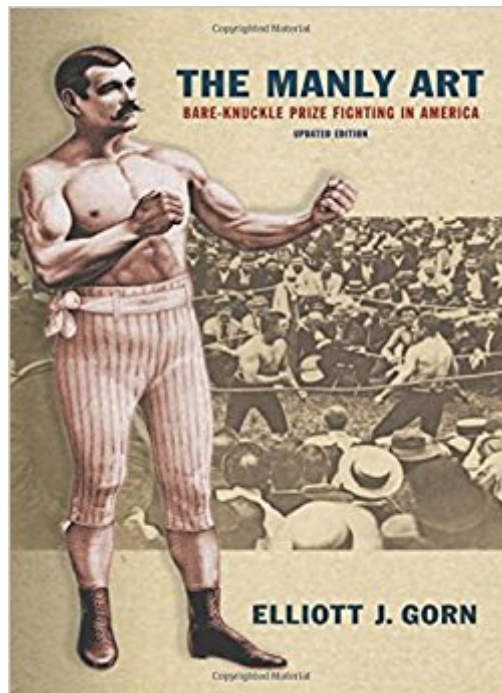




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The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting In America



Synopsis

"It didn't occur to me until fairly late in the work that I was writing a book about the beginnings of a national celebrity culture. By 1860, a few boxers had become heroes to working-class men, and big fights drew considerable newspaper coverage, most of it quite negative since the whole enterprise was illegal. But a generation later, toward the end of the century, the great John L. Sullivan of Boston had become the nation's first true sports celebrity, an American icon. The likes of poet Vachel Lindsay and novelist Theodore Dreiser lionized him—Dreiser called him 'a sort of prize fighting J. P. Morgan'—and Ernest Thompson Seton, founder of the Boy Scouts, noted approvingly that he never met a lad who would not rather be Sullivan than Leo Tolstoy."—from the Afterword to the Updated Edition Elliott J. Gorn's *The Manly Art* tells the story of boxing's origins and the sport's place in American culture. When first published in 1986, the book helped shape the ways historians write about American sport and culture, expanding scholarly boundaries by exploring masculinity as an historical subject and by suggesting that social categories like gender, class, and ethnicity can be understood only in relation to each other. This updated edition of Gorn's highly influential history of the early prize rings features a new afterword, the author's meditation on the ways in which studies of sport, gender, and popular culture have changed in the quarter century since the book was first published. An up-to-date bibliography ensures that *The Manly Art* will remain a vital resource for a new generation.

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Customer Reviews

"Gorn has done a splendid job of colorfully sketching the development of nineteenth-century prize

fighting; the book is beautifully written, extensively researched, and rooted in a sophisticated understanding of American social and cultural history. He demonstrates that a single work can combine engaging narrative and incisive analysis. . . . A delightful and path-breaking book."~ç~ American Historical Review "A book of great insight and intellectual depth. . . . Combining exhaustive research with lucid writing, Gorn has produced a book that is at once instructive, thought-provoking, and fascinating to read. He convincingly illustrates how boxing was transformed from an unauthorized activity of the urban bachelor sub-culture to a more respectable pastime within the entertainment industry of the late nineteenth century. In the process, he reveals how boxing dramatized the differences between Irish and Anglo-Saxon Americans, working and middle classes, wrongdoers and Christians, and perhaps most significantly, between men and women. Gorn artfully reveals the simultaneous fascination and disgust that people felt towards boxing, and the deep-seated emotional responses engendered by the sport. He captures the various meanings that prize fighting had for its participants and carefully details the ceremonies, rituals, and pageantry of the sport. The Manly Art is pure delight."~ç~ Journal of Sport History "Gorn is an adventurous historian with a talent for informed speculation. He has written an exciting narrative history of boxing and then gone a step further to ask a series of questions that extend his focus to the whole of nineteenth-century American culture."~ç~ The Nation "Gorn's finely conceived and craftsman-like book catches the spirit of a young nation rushing to industrialization and how prize fighting was affected by, and came to reflect, much of the national mood and character. The Manly Art is first-rate social history rendered in felicitous prose."~ç~ Chicago Sun-Times "The Manly Art is an important contribution to the study of nineteenth-century American culture. Writing with clarity, vigor, and grace, Gorn combines detailed narrative with convincing interpretations. He offers the reader a judicious selection of quotations from the sporting press that captures the drama, sensuality, and brutality of the ring and its craftsmen."~ç~ Journal of American History

This is essential reading if one wants to understand working class history in America as well as boxing. The fact that Gorn has also written a book on Mother Jones should be a great indicator of the characteristics of this work. One of the most profound insights I have gleaned from reading "The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Fighting in America" is the place of ritualized and symbolic violence in societies over time. Men crave the order of violence with rules and attach elevated importance to such contests in part because so much of life is entirely unjust, oppressive, mundane, etc. Violence is not something one, no matter one's level of expertise, can actually entirely plan for. It is chaotic,

often in a brutal way, often in a deadly way, as anyone who knows a bit about violence knows all too well. I can think of many tough young men dead young now. I can think of innocents dead now. The symbolism of the ring, or the octagon, or in our narratives of glory enshrined in whatever form--from soundbite to epic poem--gain resonance because they appeal to our desperate need for order out of the desperate appearance of chaos, for a struggle, if not for a taste of our hero's invulnerability, for a portion of his honor and nobility. Gorn ties this drive, over time, to the class struggle both in England and America, and how the working class who fought for workers rights often identified closely with great fighters and bare-knuckle boxers. This is not a mindless voyeuristic venture into violence, this study, it is a glimpse into the reality of working class heroes that perhaps many who purport to be their champions among the liberal class would rather shy away from.

A little dry in parts, but I would be surprised if there is a more detailed book on the history of bare-knuckle fighting and boxing. It was a requirement for my history of sport class, and it was interesting to read about the development of the sport, and the impact it had on American culture and vice-versa.

The material is great although I feel it gets a little too tangential but I am not sure if it was just my edition (the updated Kindle version) but there were a ton of misspellings which was especially disheartening when it comes towards names and places. It really makes me wonder if dates and such were correct as well. Still a better editor, if there was one was definitely needed.

Great overall review of society and culture during a unique time in history.

Superbly researched and written. A must read for any serious boxing fan or lover of history of sports in America.

Had to buy this for a class and it was an interesting read, surprisingly. I kept it and will read it again in the future.

Its just interesting and perhaps provides some background the cult of masculinity that seemed to come the fore in early stages of the 20th century.

Great read

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