



The Athletic Crusade: Sport and American Cultural Imperialism

Gerald R. Gems

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The Athletic Crusade is the first book to systematically analyze the role of sports in the expansion of U.S. empire from the 1890s through World War II. Gerald R. Gems details how white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant males set the standard for inclusion within American society, transferred that standard to foreign territories, and subtly used American sports to instill allegedly desirable racial, moral, and commercial virtues in colonial subjects. In the realm of such expansion, sports provided a less harsh, less militaristic means of instilling belief in a dominant system's values and principles than more overt methods such as war.

The process of change, however, had unexpected consequences as subordinate groups adapted or even rejected American overtures. Sport became a means for nonwhites to challenge whiteness, Social Darwinism, and cultural hegemony by establishing their own physical prowess, claiming a measure of esteem, and creating a greater sense of national identity. Gems shows the direct influence of sports in Hawaii, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic and explores their comparatively minimal influence in countries such as China and Japan.

Amid increasing globalization, *The Athletic Crusade* offers a welcome perspective on how the United States has attempted to spread its influence in the past and the implications for the future of indigenous and other societies.

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