

The republic of consumption at the Olympic Games: globalization, Americanization, and Californization*

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Abstract

Action sports such as beach volleyball and snowboarding have recently become popular commodities at the Olympics. While some observers view these new sports as global phenomena with transnational origins, they were incubated in California and are linked to the promotion of American visions of affluence. The encroachment of these sports onto global stages at the Olympics signals the continuing historical power of Californization, a particular brand of Americanization. The efforts to Californize the world through Olympic sports is considerably older than the debut of action sports, dating to the 1920s and 1930s when a coalition of US government agents, sports promoters, and corporate entrepreneurs began to articulate a strategy to mask Americanization campaigns in the world's leading sporting event under the veneer of California style. In the process they 'dis'-invented historical traditions, in particular Olympic sports, in order to amplify their prospects in global markets.

Keywords Americanization, consumer culture, Olympic Games, sport

At the heart of London's 2012 Olympic production a small patch of trucked-in sand symbolized for some observers the transcendence of new global patterns over older world systems. Horse Guards Parade in St James's Park, a venerable reminder of the lingering ghosts of the British empire, hosted beach volleyball, one of the newest and most telegenic events on the contemporary Olympic programme. The contrast of past and present provided a remarkable backdrop for hundreds of thousands of Olympic tourists and millions of viewers who watched the spectacle on television. The park itself stands at the historic centre of British imperial grandeur, surrounded by palaces, the Houses of Parliament, parade grounds, ceremonial malls, and the government ministries of Whitehall. Even American visitors grasped the symbolism. A family of five from Davis, California, sending narratives

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back to their hometown newspaper to describe the London Olympic gala, observed that 'It is hard to miss the irony of the beach volleyball site at Horse Guard [sic] Parade, easily the site with the most British history of any in the games.'¹

St James's Park evoked the once-vast power of the Pax Britannica, but beach volleyball evoked an entirely different system of globalization. On the sands of Horse Guards Parade, competitors from around the world clashed not in one of the sports that had served as a hallowed tradition for the British empire but in a game with roots in California's Pacific beaches. Some sort of globalization seemed triumphant in the men's draw, where a German duo bested a Brazilian pair in the final, and a Latvian team took the bronze medal over a squad from the Netherlands. On the women's side, however, Americanization with a California flavour triumphed. The final of the tournament pitted two teams of Californians against one another for the Olympic crown – or, as one California pundit put it, the 'state championship' of Olympic beach volleyball.²

London's Olympic presentation of beach volleyball, or what the British puckishly dubbed 'naked volleyball',³ illuminates the historical complexities of globalization. On one level the very presence of the sport in a global 'mega-event' betrays its worldwide appeal and showcases the expansion, intensification, and homogenization of contemporary sporting practices across localities, nations, and regions. Olympic beach volleyball represents a world phenomenon on a world stage. Conversely, the sport also signifies not only global social patterns but national, regional, and local ones, as a variety of observers revealed in commentaries about the events in St James's Park. Beach volleyball should not be interpreted solely as the triumph of the 'global imaginary' – a murky term that some scholars deploy in an effort to capture an earth-moving shift in human perspective from narrower visions to a world-encompassing view.⁴ Historically, beach volleyball in particular and the Olympics in general evoke not only globalization but also Westernization, Americanization, and Californization.

Certainly the St James's Park spectacular evoked multiple discourses about all four dimensions. Some saw in beach volleyball the undeniable structures of a new global culture, celebrating how the game attracted competitors and fans from every corner of the earth. Others saw the mostly bikini-clad and boardshort-clothed players as symbols of Westernization, or Americanization, or Californization – or some combination of the three.⁵ Many observers mixed various threads from all four of these processes into curious blends. Writing for a leading US sporting periodical, *Sports Illustrated*, Alexander Wolff celebrated how beach volleyball and other women's sports in London symbolized a greater global inclusion of women, even in those Islamic cultures that the West indicted for 'gender apartheid'. At the same time, Wolff linked globalization with Americanization, claiming that

1 'Dude, like, beach volleyball is an Olympic sport', *Davis (California) Enterprise*, 12 August 2012.

2 Mark Purdy, 'Triple crown-beach queens', *San Jose (California) Mercury News*, 9 August 2012.

3 Linda Robertson, 'In my opinion', *Miami Herald*, 26 July 2012.

4 Manfred B. Steger, *The rise of the global imaginary: political ideologies from the French revolution to the global war on terror*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

5 Marina Hyde, 'London 2012 beach volleyball is a maverick mix of Benny Hill and sport', *Guardian*, 28 July 2012; Keith Duggan, 'On this beach, they are the best on parade', *Irish Times*, 8 August 2012; Mark Whicker, 'Queens of the beach show gold mettle', *Orange County (California) Register*, 9 August 2012; 'U.S. women athletes demonstrate effect of Title IX', *Fresno (California) Bee*, 11 August 2012.

this worldwide women's movement fomented by the Olympics really represented the global triumph of a particular American piece of jurisprudence, Title IX, a gender equity law that ironically has no legal standing in any other nation in the world. Wolff did not ruminate on the irony that emerged from his analysis: that gender equity somehow sprang from beach volleyball spectacles that garnered some of their global popularity from the relentless marketing of female sexuality.⁶

For Wolff and like-minded analysts, bikini-clad American women at St James's Park became a new female battalion in a long legion of 'America's athletic missionaries' – a sporting army seeking to convert the world to American ways of life at Olympic arenas.⁷ Their bikinis themselves evoked globalization, Westernization, Americanization, and Californization. Many in the media hailed a rule change preceding the London Olympics that allowed women to opt out of bikinis as a sign of global tolerance that would permit the spread of the sport to nations that required more conservative attire for female athletes. Indeed, permission for women to wear shorts, long-sleeved shirts, and even head coverings bolstered the International Olympic Committee (IOC)'s campaign to push every nation competing to include women competitors. California's Jen Kessy, a silver medallist in London, celebrated the new sumptuary code: 'I'm most comfortable in a bikini', Kessy admitted, adding that 'I grew up in southern California'. But she hailed the end of the required bikini: 'We want women of all different religions and everyone from across the world to be able to play our sport, and to not be able to play because of the attire is not OK for us.'⁸

With or without bikinis, beach volleyball put 'California cool' at the core of London's Olympic spectacle, a feat that many in the media viewed as a new development in the global sports culture. Even from a contemporary vantage, however, the immersion of Olympic venues in Californian costumes represents a broad trend rather than a solitary episode. The 2008 Beijing Olympics witnessed not only the invasion of beach volleyball but the Olympic debut of another Californized event, BMX cycling.⁹ Meanwhile, California's spectacular 'Flying Tomato', Shaun White, dominated the California-style snowboarding showcases at the 2006 and 2010 winter Olympics.¹⁰

However, the path to lionizing 'California cool' at the Olympics predates even the 'Flying Tomato', BMX bikes, and bikini- and boardshort-clad volleyball players. California began to play a significant role in American Olympic enterprises in the 1920s and 1930s as a coalition comprised of federal agents, capitalist entrepreneurs, sport promoters, and even athletes pushed early versions of Californization that promoted swimming as a symbol of a sun-kissed version of American consumer culture that showcased youth, health, beauty, and leisure. In their promotions they advertised California cool as a globally appealing lifestyle,

6 Alexander Wolff, 'Run the world, girls', *Sports Illustrated*, 20 August 2012, pp. 40–5.

7 Edward Bayard Moss, 'America's athletic missionaries', *Harper's Weekly*, 27 July 1912.

8 Jen Kessy, quoted in Mark Sappenfield, 'London 2012 Olympics: does beach volleyball need the bikini?', *Christian Science Monitor*, 7 August 2012.

9 Mark Dyreson, 'World harmony or an athletic "clash of civilizations"? Nationalism versus transnationalism in Olympic spectacles', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 29, 9, 2012, pp. 1231–42.

10 More than 3 million copies have been sold globally of the several versions of *Shaun White snowboarding* in a variety of gaming formats produced by Ubisoft underscores. See Tracy Anderson, 'Shaun White snowboarding: 3,000,000 sold', <http://xgames.espn.go.com/article/4137897> (consulted 17 March 2013).

a brand of American-style consumerism that they imagined global markets would eagerly embrace. From the outset Olympian Californization has been inextricably linked with Americanization, even though some observers have missed the underlying congruence between these trends, leading them to confuse the origins and trajectories of these patterns of culture.

Action sports, globalization, Americanization, and Californization

To many writers in the media, to the shrewd marketing moguls of the IOC, to the corporate producers of action-sports haberdashery, and to the world's sports fans, beach volleyball, BMX cycling, and snowboarding represent the very recent globalization of modern sport. The increasing popularity of these events and other action sports at the world's leading mega-event signals the arrival of a new global culture dominated by new, transnational forms of sport. Just a few years ago Michael Jordan and the 'Dream Team' marked the onset, through an older sport, of a new global capitalism in which American culture shapes global trends – or so the doyen of American foreign relations historians, Walter LaFeber, has argued. Basketball, he explains, expanded from an American into a global product. A new world order was emerging: a structure that still bore the imprint of American designs but one that increasingly centred on global markets and global power rather than national markets and national power.¹¹

The IOC embraced and profited from this new globalization of basketball, and even more so from other pastimes. Beyond basketball the committee added a whole series of new action sports to connect the Olympic movement to a thriving global youth culture enamoured with these novel pastimes. For many observers, the rapid emergence of action sports seemed to be the next evolutionary step in the development of a global sporting culture. Basketball had historical roots in a particular nation – the United States. Other popular international games also had national origins. Baseball, for instance, emerged from the United States while the world's most popular game, association football, spread from Great Britain. With few exceptions the Olympic programme – indeed the entire Olympic project itself – has deep historical roots in the West. The Olympics are certainly a global event, but they are also clearly a Western invention.¹² With these new action sports the IOC seemingly discovered a method for transcending nationalism that went beyond even the globalization of basketball.

The new action sports that the IOC added to the Olympic programme – beginning as early as 1984 with the inclusion of windsurfing – seemed to float in a novel, transnational space. Though popular in the Western homelands of modern sports, and particularly in the USA, many observers perceived these new sports as detached from the traditions of nationalism. Action sports seemed to be the property of the rising affluent middle classes, which had expanded worldwide through the new global capitalism. Beach volleyball players served and volleyed not only in Santa Monica but in Rio de Janeiro; snowboarders shredded in both Squaw Valley and Chamonix; BMX bikers vaulted off jumps in the suburbs of

11 Walter LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the new global capitalism*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1999.

12 Allen Guttman, *Games and empires: modern sports and cultural imperialism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Beijing as well as those of Los Angeles; mountain bikers pedalled over single-track trails outside Kigali as well as Sacramento; windsurfers raced off the beaches of Pomona and Phuket; triathletes swam, biked, and ran in both San Diego and Abu Dhabi. Many chroniclers assessed these new sports as precisely the tonic that the stodgy, Eurocentric IOC needed to maintain mega-vitality in the twenty-first century, since they attracted a youthful demographic and created compelling television. The IOC's marketing wizards pitched extreme sports as the post-national pastimes of the dawning global era. Cognoscenti cheered that the IOC had moved beyond the 'Dream Team' and into a new phase of hyper-globalization. As the American progressive political commentator Julianne Malveaux put it, the 'Olympics are about the globalization of our world, about the ways that we have all adapted each other's ways ... each other's sport, each other's energies'.¹³

The 'dis'-invention of tradition: Olympian obfuscation and action sports

The assertion, however, that extreme sports are transnational inventions is in fact quite misleading. The claim that Olympian action sports emerged from some sort of transnational space created by globalization obscures the historical lineages of these pastimes. Not only pundits enthralled by transnational ideologies but corporate purveyors of action-sports lifestyles spin these yarns. Indeed, action sports represent an inversion of the trend in the cultural history of modern sports to 'invent traditions'. As the originators of this paradigm, the historians Terence Ranger and Eric Hobsbawm, contended, invented traditions represent the creation of rituals that claim long but 'largely fictitious' historical lineages in order to confer social and political capital.¹⁴ The practice of inventing traditions has been especially powerful in modern sports. Indeed, the revival of the Olympics represent a classic effort to link the contemporary era to the universe of antiquity in a 'largely fictitious' continuum.¹⁵

The idea that action sports are the trans-historical offspring of the processes of globalization represents not an invention of tradition but rather a 'dis'-invention. Presenting extreme sports as having sprung from the global ether without a connection to any particular nation or culture conceals the actual development of these pastimes. The invention of sporting traditions has served especially to unify national cultures against competing social identities. Unification, of a different sort, also animates the disguise of sporting traditions. In this case, the dis-invention of tradition in depicting action sports as pan-national inventions without specific origins in a nation or region is designed to make them more attractive commodities in global markets. Masking the birth of these new sports creates the largely fictitious notion of a unified global web of consumers linked by their devotion to a particular lifestyle.

While the historical genealogies of action sports are not, when viewed from grander chronologies, particularly long continuums, these sports nevertheless do have specific

13 'Malveaux at large: the Olympic hype – stereotypes both reinforced and shattered', *San Francisco Sun Reporter*, 26 August 2004.

14 E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, eds., *The invention of tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

15 Alexander Kitroeff, *Wrestling with the ancients: modern Greek identity and the Olympics*, New York: Greekworks.com, 2004.

historical links to a particular nation and to a particular culture. Snowboarding and windsurfing, beach volleyball and triathlon, mountain biking and BMX cycling all emerged and grew in a particular culture, in a particular place, at a particular time. Since the 1970s California has incubated all of these action sports and many others, in the same way that the 'Golden State' has developed so many other cultural movements since the mid twentieth century, from Hollywood movies to mass-market beachwear. Since the 1920s California has served as the headquarters for an American (and global) lifestyle-manufacturing complex, an industrial-culture behemoth that has produced everything from the new sexual mores of the 'Summer of Love' to the adoption of blue jeans as the global uniform of the haute bourgeoisie to the microcomputer revolution to the aforementioned action-sports pastimes.¹⁶

That windsurfing, beach volleyball, mountain biking, triathlon, snowboarding, and the rest of the family of extreme sports are popular in many areas around the world is, of course, true. That they are ahistorical creations of a postmodern global culture is deceptive. The connection of these sports to the practice of the 'good life' promised by the affluent abundance produced for some of the world by the culture of consumption connects them historically to modern Western dreams about the universal power of markets. These sports emerged from the centre of global promotion of the affluent visions of consumer culture, a region led since the early twentieth century by the United States, with one of its major headquarters in California. Thus an American republic of consumption spawned these new pastimes that are transforming international sporting habits and reshaping the Olympics. The Californized branch of the republic of consumption that has transformed the Olympics since the 1980s has deeper historical roots than most people imagine – roots that stretch back into the 1920s.

The republic of consumption and Olympic stages

The idea that the United States represents a polity knit together as much by the habits of consumption as by a shared history or the machinery of political tradition or by some other traditional mechanism that produces what an older generation of republicans called civic virtue and a current school labels social capital represents an important analytical device in American history. The historian Lisbeth Cohen has argued for conceptualizing the United States as a 'consumer republic'. She insists that since the Second World War mass consumption has served as the most crucial social and political determinant in US history.¹⁷ Other American historians, both anticipating and revising Cohen's consumer republic, have quibbled with her chronology, pushing the rise of such a republic of consumption back as far as the origins of American republicanism itself in the colonial era.¹⁸ These sketches of the

16 Bill Osgerby, *Playboys in paradise: masculinity, youth and leisure-style in modern America*, Oxford: Berg, 2001; Frédéric Savre, Jean Saint-Martin, and Thierry Terret, 'From Marin County's seventies clunker to the Durango world championship 1990: a history of mountain biking in the USA', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 27, 11, 2010, pp. 1942–67.

17 Lisbeth Cohen, *A consumer's republic: the politics of mass consumption in postwar America*, New York: Knopf, 2003.

18 For the First World War as catalyst of consumption see Lynn Dumenil, *The modern temper: American culture and society in the 1920s*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1995. For a post-Civil War dating see Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *American consumer society, 1865–2005: from hearth to HDTV*, Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2009.

republic of consumption should not be read as assertions that a broad economic equality has characterized the nation's history. Indeed, the writers note that while many shared a common view of the good life that could be acquired by consumption, disparities of wealth and income created deep social divisions.

The 'republic of consumption' has deep roots in American history, manifesting itself everywhere from the republic of drinking culture that thrived in the aftermath of the Revolution and produced what some historians have dubbed an 'alcoholic republic',¹⁹ to the ultimate contemporary website devoted to the American consumption of leisure, 'FanNation', which declares itself 'The Republic of Sport'.²⁰ Given the number of beer advertisements linked to FanNation it seems that the alcoholic republic remains intact in the twenty-first century, having transformed itself from imbibing revolutionary veterans in taverns to suds-soaked sports fans in suburban sports bars. The cyberspace 'Republic of Sport' that links 'citizens' through the consumption of sport has older origins: it coagulated into a distinct form in the period between the world wars, and its contours came into sharp relief at the Olympics, the most significant international sporting commodity of that epoch.

The modern Olympic movement, like the earlier World's Fair movement from which the Olympics borrowed both inspiration and templates, provides global stages for proclaiming national narratives. The Olympics and the expositions served as early conduits for a certain form of globalization by providing international opportunities for economic, political, and cultural exchange. Indeed, the sociologist Maurice Roche has argued that the Olympics and world's fairs represent crucial 'mega-events' for a new global system that has emerged since the first of these events, the 1851 Great Exhibition at London's Crystal Palace.²¹ Roche posits that the 1936 Berlin games represented the full emergence of the Olympics as a global mega-event, ironically at a time when world's fairs were in rapid decline. Historian Matthew Llewellyn and I have argued that the 1932 Los Angeles games actually represented the pivotal moment in Olympian globalization, providing the groundwork upon which the 'Nazi Olympics' built a worldwide spectacle.²² The global arenas offered by expositions and Olympic Games have also served as opportunities for Americanization, for campaigns to transform the world's multiplicity of societies through the exhibition of American commerce and culture.²³

Certainly the US is not unique in using globalization for its own designs, as the histories of international exchange in these events illuminate.²⁴ A multitude of nations have used the

For origins at the time of the War of Independence, see Richard L. Bushman, *The refinement of America: persons, houses, cities*, New York: Knopf, 1992; T. H. Breen, *The marketplace of revolution: how consumer politics shaped American independence*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

19 W. J. Rorabaugh, *The alcoholic republic: an American tradition*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.

20 FanNation: The Republic of Sport, <http://www.fannation.com/> (consulted 10 January 2011).

21 Maurice Roche, *Mega-events and modernity: Olympics and expos in the growth of global culture*, London: Routledge, 2000.

22 Mark Dyreson and Matthew Llewellyn, 'Los Angeles is *the* Olympic city: legacies of 1932 and 1984', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 25, 14, 2008, pp. 1991–2018.

23 Joseph Nye, Jr, *The paradox of American power: why the world's only super power can't go it alone*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

24 On the Olympics, world's fairs, and American nationalism see Mark Dyreson, 'Showcases for global aspirations: meditations on the histories of Olympic Games and world's fairs', *International Journal of the*

Olympics to project and refine national identity. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and East Germany built massive Olympic programmes to promote their nations.²⁵ More recently, China has sought to make an international reputation through the Olympics;²⁶ European nations have used the Olympics to promote or contest national identities.²⁷ Asian, African, and Latin American nations have utilized the Olympics in the quest for international recognition and status.²⁸ However, few nations have used the Olympics for the projection of nationalism as consistently over time – at every Olympics contested since 1896 – or as fervently as the United States, with the possible exceptions of Greece and Australia.²⁹ Even when the US boycotted the 1980 Olympics, nationalism remained paramount in both government policy and popular dissent.³⁰ By the many unofficial accounts that abound online, the USA has won more than twice as many medals since 1896 as the ‘silver medallist’ in medal counts, the now-defunct Soviet Union. Even in the winter games the USA ranks a surprisingly close second on the all-time list to Norway.³¹

In several previous works I have argued that since 1896 the huge haul of medals collected at Olympics by the USA has provided politicians and pundits with opportunities to promote Americanization and tout claims of exceptionalism. At the original modern games in Athens the American press heralded US Olympians as proof for both domestic and foreign audiences that their nation was an exceptional place that provided superior social conditions for both

History of Sport, 27, 16–18, 2010, pp. 3037–44. On global exhibitions and national display see Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral vistas: the expositions universelles, great exhibitions and world's fairs, 1851–1939*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988.

- 25 Robert Edelman, *Serious fun: a history of spectator sports in the USSR*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993; Mike Dennis and Jonathan Grix, *Sport under communism: behind the East German ‘miracle’*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- 26 Susan Brownell, *Beijing’s games: what the Olympics mean to China*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008; Guoqui Xu, *Olympic dreams: China and sports, 1895–2008*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.
- 27 John Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia? Catalan nationalism, Spanish identity, and the Barcelona Olympic Games*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; Arne Martin Klausen, *Olympic Games as performance and public event: the case of the XVII Winter Olympic Games in Norway*, New York: Berghahn Books, 1999; Barbara Keys, *Globalizing sport: national rivalry and international community in the 1930s*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006; Richard Mandell, *The Nazi Olympics*, New York: Macmillan, 1971.
- 28 Victor D. Cha, *Beyond the final score: the politics of sport in Asia*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009; John Bale and Joe Sang, *Kenyan running: movement culture, geography, and global change*, London: Frank Cass, 1996; Kevin B. Witherspoon, *Before the eyes of the world: Mexico and the 1968 Olympic Games*, DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008; Alan Tomlinson and Christopher Young, eds., *National identity and global sports events: culture, politics, and spectacle in the Olympics and the football world cup*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005.
- 29 Kitroeff, *Wrestling with the ancients*; Daryl Adair and Wray Vamplew, *Sport in Australian history*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997; Richard Cashman, *Sport in the national imagination: Australian sport in the Federation decades*, Sydney: Walla Walla Press/Centre for Olympic Studies, University of New South Wales, 2002.
- 30 Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, *Dropping the torch: Jimmy Carter, the Olympic boycott, and the Cold War*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- 31 An Italian Olympic site lists the USA with 2,552 medals by 2012 while the USSR has 1,204 (with no more, presumably, to come). Norway leads the winter games count with 303 to 253 for the USA. Wikipedia agrees on the winter count but overall gives the USA 2,652 while keeping the USSR’s total at 1,204. See <http://www.olympic.it/english/medal/overall.htm> and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All-time_Olympic_Games_medal_table (both accessed 10 March 2013).

natives and immigrants. Legions of examples of Americanization have marked the Olympics ever since.³²

In the 1920s, as the cultural force of the republic of consumption expanded in American society, the patterns of Olympic Americanization shifted and the first stirrings of Olympic Californization emerged. Before then, American Olympic teams belonged to a different universe of republicanism. Social reformers and sporting popularizers of this earlier version of a sporting republic contended that sports supported the traditional categories of republican political and social ideology, bolstering popular representative government, inculcating common cultural values, promoting faith in constitutions, fertilizing the cultivation of civic virtue, and incorporating the free exercise of individual talents into communal endeavours. In the sporting republic that flourished in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century United States, American Olympians stood as emblems of a republic knit together by more than just common patterns of consumption. Heralded as ‘America’s athletic missionaries’, US Olympians promised the nation republican renewal in an urban-industrial universe.³³

As I have contended in a series of articles, the 1920s brought a sea change in attitudes and perceptions. In sport, as in other realms, a conviction that the consumption of goods and experiences knit the American republic together pushed the older concepts of republicanism into the background and placed consumption at the centre.³⁴ Instead of serving as icons of resilient pluralism and evangelical republicanism – America’s athletic missionaries – in the 1920s American teams became advertisements for a republic founded on consumption. The American Olympic leader Colonel Robert Means Thompson fondly proclaimed that the fundamental purpose for sending American teams to the Olympics in the 1920s was to ‘sell the United States to the rest of the world’.³⁵ Even foreign observers came to a similar conclusion. The British historian H. Perry Robinson, during an era in which his own nation’s Olympic fortunes floundered,³⁶ concurred with Thompson:

Considered merely as an advertisement, the investment of the United States in the Olympic Games has been almost fabulously profitable. It might plausibly be argued

32 Mark Dyreson, *Making the American team: sport, culture, and the Olympic experience*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998; idem, *Crafting patriotism for global domination: America at the Olympics*, London: Routledge, 2009.

33 Dyreson, *Crafting patriotism*.

34 Mark Dyreson, ‘The emergence of consumer culture and the transformation of physical culture: American sport in the 1920s’, *Journal of Sport History* 16, 3, 1989, pp. 261–281; idem, ‘Selling American civilization: the Olympic Games of 1920 and American culture’, *Olympika* 8, 1999, pp. 1–41; idem, ‘Scripting the American Olympic story-telling formula: the 1924 Paris Olympic Games and the American media’, *Olympika* 5, 1996, pp. 45–80; idem, ; Mark Dyreson, ‘Marketing national identity: the Olympic Games of 1932 and American culture’, *Olympika* 4, 1995, pp. 23–48; idem, ‘Icons of liberty or objects of desire? American women Olympians and the politics of consumption’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 38, 3, 2001, pp. 435–460; ‘Johnny Weissmuller and the old global capitalism: the origins of the federal blueprint for selling American culture to the world’, *International Journal of the History of Sport* 25, 2, 2008, pp. 268–283; idem, ‘Marketing Weissmuller to the world: Hollywood’s Olympics and federal schemes for Americanization through sport’, *International Journal of the History of Sport* 25, 2, 2008, pp. 284–306.

35 National Archives and Record Administration II, College Park, Maryland (henceforth NACP), State Department Records Division, Record Group 59, Box 5069, American Olympic Association, ‘Minutes of the quadrennial meeting of the American Olympic Association’, Willard Hotel, Washington, DC, 22 November 1922.

36 See Matthew Lewellyn, *Rule Britannia: nationalism, identity, and the modern Olympic Games*, London: Routledge, 2012.

that no other single thing – not its wealth or power, not its share in the war, not even the splendour of its world-wide charities and benefactions – has done so much to win admiration for the United States, at least in the eyes of the youth of the world, as have the American triumphs in the Olympic Games.³⁷

The observations of a British historian and an American Olympic leader illuminated a basic tenet in how the United States understood the Olympics, as the older sporting republic that spawned America's athletic missionaries melted into the new republic of consumption that increasingly dominated the nation's political economy. Certainly this new emphasis on selling American civilization through sport was built on older foundations. The American entrepreneur Albert Goodwill Spalding had used the Olympic Games since the early 1900s to advertise US sporting goods, building on his own tradition of staging sporting events to sell his wares, which he began with his sponsorship of the 1888–89 global tour of baseball's Chicago White Stockings.³⁸ In the 1920s and continuing even during the economic calamities of the 1930s, American Olympic teams took their sales campaigns to new levels.

The Californization of the American Olympic enterprise

Before the 1920s the US Olympic movement had been centred in the urban Northeast, the economic, political, and cultural power centre of the nation. The American Olympic Committee (AOC), a private organization comprised mainly of elite men, particularly rich professionals, entrepreneurs, investors, and high-ranking US military officers, was based in New York City. With a membership drawn mainly from the 'Eastern Establishment', the Ivy League-educated leadership class of the nation, the AOC was deeply enmeshed with the federal government – even though the government did not directly fund US Olympic teams.³⁹

During the 1920s American economic and cultural power began a westward shift, with California rising as a West Coast rival to long-established patterns. The republic of consumption opened a dynamic new hub centred in California, revolving around the expanding movie industry in Los Angeles. While New York City remained the nation's financial centre and the capital of the print media, and Washington served as the locus of federal power, Los Angeles operated as the core of the nation's burgeoning lifestyle industry, manufacturing not only cinematic products but all manner of the elements of style – celebrities, fashions, popular music, amusement trends, tourist sites, and recreational fads.⁴⁰

37 H. Perry Robinson, 'England and the Olympic Games', *Nineteenth Century*, September 1924, p. 415.

38 For Spalding's Olympic advertisements see James Edward Sullivan, ed., *The Olympic Games at Athens, 1906*, New York: American Sports Publishing, 1906; idem, *The Olympic Games at Stockholm, 1912*, New York: American Sports Publishing, 1912. On Spalding's world tour see Thomas W. Zeiler, *Ambassadors in pinstripes: the Spalding world baseball tour and the birth of the American empire*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006.

39 Robert E. Lehr, 'The American Olympic committee, 1896–1940: from chaos to order', PhD thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1985; John A. Lucas, 'Architects of the modernized American Olympic Committee, 1921–1928: Gustavus Town Kirby, Robert Means Thompson, and General Douglas MacArthur', *Journal of Sport History*, 22, 1, 1995, pp. 38–45.

40 Kevin Starr, *Material dreams: southern California through the 1920s*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990; idem, *Endangered dreams: the Great Depression in California*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996; idem, *The dream endures: California enters the 1940s*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

The shifting geography of power had an impact on the US Olympic movement as well as other institutions. The AOC offices remained ensconced in Manhattan, and when teams returned from Olympic sites in Europe during the 1920s they continued to receive traditional ticker-tape parades through Gotham.⁴¹ But California began to play an increasingly powerful role in American Olympic productions. The West Coast trials for Olympic track and field drew the largest crowds and the most money. Swimmers, divers, figure skaters, and other athletes found post-athletic careers in the film studios. It should perhaps come as no surprise, therefore, that the first American athlete truly to grasp the complexities of the republic of consumption during this era and to take control of his own career as an athletic commodity was a California transplant, the sprinter Charles ‘Champagne Charley’ Paddock. Born in Texas, Paddock grew up in the Los Angeles suburb of Pasadena and became an athletic star at the University of Southern California. After numerous world record performances and a gold medal at the 1920 Antwerp Olympics, publicists dubbed him the ‘world’s fastest human’ – the first athlete to acquire that lucrative moniker.⁴²

Paddock zealously guarded that appellation throughout the 1920s, keeping himself in the spotlight even though Great Britain’s Harold Abrahams trounced him in a ‘world’s fastest human’ race (the 100-metre dash) at the 1924 Paris games. Paddock relentlessly ‘consumerized’ himself by launching high-profile world running tours and making national junkets giving motivational speeches. A series of well-publicized run-ins with American guardians of amateurism over his efforts to turn his status as a celebrity into cash also kept him in the media spotlight. He even joined the media himself, translating his sprinting fame into a career writing about sports for glossy mass-market magazines. His favourite subject was generally himself, and his manufacture of his own celebrity in the print media and in newsreels won him famous friends in Hollywood’s film industry such as Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford, as well as several roles in silent movies playing thinly disguised versions of himself.⁴³

Paddock personified the growing Californization of American Olympic enterprises among athletes and in the media. At the same time, Californization crept into another dimension of the American Olympic industry: the quest to bring the spectacular Olympic brand back to American soil. Paddock’s new hometown of Los Angeles eventually won that pursuit over more established American metropolises, including the nation’s economic and cultural capital in New York City and the national capital in Washington.

As Europe descended into the Great War, urban boosters in Los Angeles, New York, and Washington entertained the notion that their city might host the Olympics, perhaps even acquiring the rights to Berlin’s doomed 1916 games. When the global war scuttled those games, American entrepreneurs and civic leaders set their sights on the 1920, 1924, or 1928 Olympics; the AOC, ensconced in its Manhattan offices, floated several plans to bring the

41 ‘Olympic Games heroes parade on 5th Avenue’, *New York Tribune*, 3 October 1920; ‘City hails return of Olympic victors’, *New York Times*, 7 August 1924; ‘Olympians back with records and no alibis’, *New York Herald Tribune*, 23 August 1928.

42 John Gleaves and Matthew P. Llewellyn, ‘Charles Paddock and the changing state of Olympic amateurism’, *Olympika*, 21, 2012, pp. 1–32.

43 ‘Charles Paddock’, IMDB database, <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0655610/> (consulted 22 February 2011).

Olympics to New York. However, none of the proposals garnered enough public support to get ground broken for a suitable stadium.⁴⁴ By the end of the First World War the AOC's New York leadership cabal had switched its support to Washington, joining local efforts to construct a national stadium in the federal capital that would bring the Olympics to American soil. From 1914 until the end of the 1920s, Congress debated a series of bills calling for a national stadium that would, its advocates promised, bring the Olympics to the nation's capital.⁴⁵

Those debates, however, failed to produce a national stadium. Plan after plan gained initial interest but ultimately fizzled. Undaunted even after Los Angeles had finished a giant stadium and secured the bid for the 1932 Olympics, Washington politicians attempted to steal the games from California and make them a focal point for the 1932 bicentennial celebration of George Washington's birth.⁴⁶ After that ploy failed, the assistant secretary to the US Navy, Commodore Ernest Lee Jahncke, who was also a member of the IOC and the AOC, lamented that the 'next Olympics would obtain a much more dignified environment, not to mention greater publicity, greater crowds and a larger number of competitors if held in Washington'.⁴⁷ Swimming against the tide of Californization, Jahncke nearly drowned in his own rhetoric. Questions of dignity aside, by the time Los Angeles won the tri-city battle to host an American Olympics it was well on its way to becoming one of the nation's public relations capitals, rivalling Washington and New York as a propaganda centre for the American way of life.

In that era, Los Angeles was literally a brand-new city sprung from a desert valley on the Pacific Coast. It mushroomed from the thirty-sixth-largest city in the USA to the fifth between 1900 and 1930, growing to 1.2 million residents. Its triumph over New York and Washington provided an indicator of the increasing Californization of American culture, as Commodore Jahncke ruefully observed in his comment about improving the 'dignity' of the games by moving them to Washington. Jahncke's other claims – that the national capital would draw larger crowds and more publicity than California – proved unfounded. By the 1920s Los Angeles had become the cinematic capital of the world and increasingly rivalled New York as a centre of cultural production for domestic and foreign markets.⁴⁸ The Los Angeles organizers of the games – a group that included the movie mogul Louis B. Mayer,

44 'Los Angeles wants Olympic Games', *New York Times*, 5 April 1915; 'Plan for stadium in Central Park', *New York Times*, 13 November 1912; 'No games and no stadium', *New York Times*, 15 April 1913; 'Stadium in Central Park', *New York Times*, 6 January 1917; 'No stadium in the park', *New York Times*, 17 January 1917.

45 'A real capital', *Washington Post*, 20 November 1914; 'Improving the capital', *Washington Post*, 31 May 1915; 'Want national stadium', *New York Times*, 5 January 1916; 'Plan stadium in nation's capital', *New York Times*, 22 April 1916; 'Bill for huge stadium', *Washington Post*, 22 April 1916; 'Stadium bill is urged', *Washington Post*, 13 May 1916; 'Plan to beautify city', *Washington Post*, 9 February 1917; 'Plans to force Olympic issue', *Washington Post*, 23 February 1922; 'Would weld forces for stadium here', *Washington Post*, 3 October 1925; 'National stadium bill given House tomorrow', *Washington Post*, 3 January 1926; 'May erect stadium as war memorial', *New York Times*, 8 May 1926; 'Plan for financing national stadium is to be worked out', *Washington Post*, 16 February 1927; 'Stadium proposed as big memorial here to Roosevelt', *Washington Post*, 30 November 1926; 'Big stadium for Washington proposed by Congressmen', *New York Times*, 6 February 1927; Don B. Reed, 'Why not a memorial coliseum?', *Washington Post Sunday Magazine*, 16 June 1929.

46 'Big stadium for Washington proposed by Congressmen', *New York Times*, 6 February 1927.

47 'Assistant Navy head boosts capital as sports center', *Washington Post*, 20 May 1929.

48 Tom Sitton, *Metropolis in the making: Los Angeles in the 1920s*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001; Starr, *Material dreams*.

head of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) – upgraded the newly built Los Angeles Coliseum from 75,000 seats to 105,000 seats, guaranteeing enormous crowds.⁴⁹

The Los Angeles bids were supported by the successful completion of the Coliseum – an edifice originally dubbed the Olympic Stadium, a moniker that testified to the city-booster's ultimate goals.⁵⁰ With New York and Washington simply not felt to be up to the task, William May Garland had led the crusade to capture the Olympics. A transplant to California, like so many other Angeleños of that era, after migrating from Chicago Garland made his fortune in the booming real estate market.⁵¹ With construction underway for the massive stadium Garland launched bids for the 1924 and 1928 Olympics (which went to Paris and Amsterdam respectively) before finally landing the 1932 games.⁵²

As I have contended in an earlier work, in promoting Los Angeles for the Olympics Garland invented the modern Olympic bidding process whereby cities competed for the games by making sales pitches to the IOC, a habit that had not been in place before the Los Angeles boosters pioneered the strategy. Garland's lobbying won him a seat as an American member of the IOC, alongside Commodore Jahncke; it also eventually won the Olympics for Los Angeles. Impressed when Garland and Los Angeles promised to take over the 1924 Olympics if Paris – beset by financial and political crises – failed to fulfil its hosting duties, the IOC awarded California the 1932 Olympics.⁵³ The Californization of the games had clearly commenced.

The national and international spread of Californization: federal plans to Americanize the globe through the Olympics

Garland's elevation to equality with Jahncke on the IOC and Los Angeles' successful acquisition of the Olympics symbolized the growing influence of California in national and international affairs. During the 1920s the federal government and major corporate interests recognized that American prowess at the Olympics opened the doors to both the spread of American influence and the extension of American commerce. Spurred by a request from a consortium of sports businesses that the expansion of American power in the Great War had opened the possibility of reaping huge profits by selling American sports to the world, federal agents at the Department of Commerce and the Department of State began to conceive of the Olympics as a venue for spreading American influence and marketing American products.⁵⁴

49 Bill Wise, 'These things you should know about the tenth Olympiad', *Game and Gossip*, August 1932, pp. 9, 42.

50 Steve Riess, 'Power without authority: Los Angeles' elites and the construction of the Coliseum', *Journal of Sport History* 8, 1, 1981, pp. 50–65.

51 Archives of the LA84 Foundation, Paul Ziffren Sports Library, Los Angeles, California (henceforth LA84), 'In the matter of the funds realized from the Olympic Games held in California in 1932'.

52 'California bids \$300,000 for 1924 Olympics', *New York Times*, 14 July 1924; Riess, 'Power without authority', 50–65.

53 Mark Dyreson, 'The endless bid: Los Angeles and the advertisement of the American West', *Journal of the West*, 47, 4, 2008, pp. 26–39.

54 NACP. The materials are scattered among the records of both the Department of Commerce and the Department of State. The chief locations are: files on Sporting goods–Olympic Games, 1923–1931; and Sporting goods–general file, both in Records of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, general

Among the government officials who helped to immerse American Olympians in the machinery of market capitalism was none other than Herbert Clark Hoover, an Iowan by birth but a graduate of California's Stanford University where he served as the business manager of the university baseball team. Hoover travelled the world after graduation, making a fortune as a mining engineer, while always keeping a base in California. As the Secretary of Commerce for two Republican presidents in the 1920s he served as the lead architect of the new republic of consumption⁵⁵ and helped to develop a federal project to globalize the republic of consumption through the promotion of American sports around the world. Responding to growing evidence of a global sports boom, particularly the burgeoning international fascination with the Olympics, he directed the Department of Commerce to join with the Department of State in an ambitious plan to use the Olympics as an instrument of American statecraft – 'dollar diplomacy' via sport.⁵⁶

Following Hoover's mandate, federal agencies developed a massive database documenting a worldwide passion for sports emerging not only in the appetites of a few affluent elites but also among the teeming global masses. The news that Los Angeles would host the 1932 Olympics seemed to the federal agents a strategic opportunity for opening mass markets for peddling both American sporting goods and the American way of life around the world.⁵⁷ One of Hoover's lieutenants, Julius Klein, a native Californian and the Director of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, identified American Olympians as crucial to the international expansion of a republic of consumption, crediting them with creating an American brand that would establish US dominion over the global sport craze.⁵⁸

As US government experts designed their scheme to export American goods and influence through sport, they faced several hurdles: in particular the reality that, as the data gathered by foreign-service operatives from every part of the globe indicated, popular US games such as baseball, basketball, and American football had little following in most areas of the world represented a critical obstacle. The reports revealed to American diplomats that a British game, association football, dominated the world's attention. Foreign efforts to challenge soccer's global reign with American games seemed hopeless. Yet the federal experts lamented that domestic efforts to make soccer the American national pastime and thus Americanize the world's game seemed even more hopeless.⁵⁹

records of the Department of Commerce, record group (henceforth RG) 151; files in the State Department decimal files 811.4063 Olympic Games and in the individual nation records at 811.4063, Foreign Relations Microfilm Files, both in the State Department Records Division, record group 59.

- 55 Joan Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: forgotten progressive*, Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1975.
- 56 NACP, RG 151, box 849, sporting goods-general, 1923–1931 file, letters, correspondence, and reports.
- 57 Ibid. See especially A. B. Coffman to Henry Morse, 13 July 1923; Coffman to Herbert Hoover, 24 March 1923; Hoover to Coffman, 3 April 1923; Henry Morse to Mr Emmet, 30 March 1923; Coffman to Morse, 13 July 1923; E. J. Breyere to Mr North, 19 July 1923; Morse to Coffman, 20 July 1923; Questionnaire No. 84, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, n.d.; Walter L. Miller, memos to the Editorial Division, the Latin American Division, the Eastern European Division, the Western European Division, the Far Eastern Division, 1 August 1923; US Department of State to the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, 15 August 1923.
- 58 *European market for sporting and athletic goods: trade information bulletin*, no. 179, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1924, p. ii.
- 59 NACP, RG 151, sporting goods-Olympic Games, 1923–1931, and sporting goods-general file; RG 59, State Department decimal files 811.4063 Olympic Games, memoranda and correspondence.

While the bureaucrats of the State and Commerce Departments faced the conundrum that American national pastimes such as baseball and American football did not yet enjoy extensive global appeal, promoters of those sports sought unsuccessfully to insert them into the Olympic programme. American boosters managed to have baseball installed as a demonstration sport at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, where a game between two American teams mystified an enormous German crowd of more than 100,000.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, baseball would have been a centrepiece of the 1940 Tokyo Olympics had the Second World War not scuttled those games.⁶¹ American football had actually been a demonstration event at the Los Angeles Olympics four years before the Berlin games. The game pitted a squad of Eastern collegians from Harvard, Yale, and Princeton against a Western squad recruited from Stanford, the University of California, and the University of Southern California. An enthusiastic throng of American fans cheered while foreign observers were even more mystified by the action in the Coliseum than the Berlin throng at the Olympic baseball demonstration four years later.⁶² The USA did manage to get basketball installed on the Olympic docket in 1936, but in that era the game was hardly the major national brand it became in the later twentieth century, when the National Basketball Association used the Olympics to expand its market.⁶³

Without major or even minor American pastimes on the Olympic roster, the State and Commerce Departments looked for alternative pathways for enhancing the Americanization potential of the global spectacle. Turning to California for inspiration, they seized on the Olympic sport of swimming as an alternative vehicle for projecting American soft power. The USA dominated the world in Olympic swimming pools – and swimming pools became symbols of both American affluence and American power. In the 1920s and 1930s California led the nation in a residential pool-building boom that created a commercial and cultural juggernaut for the marketing of lifestyles.⁶⁴ The federal plan promoted a global extension of Californization by evoking dazzling images of sun-kissed, leisure-rich, affluent lifestyles that could be sold via the rapidly developing international market for swim fashions and beachwear, a burgeoning American big business.⁶⁵

60 Leslie Mann, 'Report of manager of baseball team', in Frederick W. Rubien, ed., *Report of the American Olympic Committee: Games of the XIth Olympiad; IVth Olympic Winter Games*, New York: American Olympic Committee, 1936, pp. 302–5; Organisationskomitee für die XI. Olympiade Berlin 1936 E.V., *The XIth Olympic Games, Berlin, 1936, official report, volume I*, Berlin: Wilhelm Limpert, 1936, pp. 498–9; 'American baseballers play to 100,000 bored Europeans', *Miami Herald*, 13 August 1936.

61 'The games of the XIIth Olympiad', *Official Bulletin of the International Olympic Committee*, October 1937, p. 8.

62 Frank J. Taylor, 'All roads lead to the Olympiad', *Sunset Magazine*, July 1932, pp. 6–7; 'Demonstrations: American football and lacrosse', in Xth Olympiad Committee, *The games of the Xth Olympiad*, Los Angeles: Woffler, 1933, pp. 739–47.

63 Carson Cunningham, *American hoops: US men's Olympic basketball from Berlin to Beijing*, Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009.

64 Jeff Wiltse, *Contested waters: a social history of American swimming pools*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007, pp. 102–5.

65 NACP, RG 151, sporting goods–Olympic Games, 1923–1931, and sporting goods–general file; RG 59, State Department decimal files 811.4063 Olympic Games, memoranda and correspondence. On the growing power of California culture see the canonical corpus of Kevin Starr: *Americans and the California dream, 1850–1915*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1973; *Inventing the dream: California through the Progressive Era*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985; *Material dreams; Endangered dreams; Embattled dreams: California in war and peace, 1940–1950*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002; *The dream endures; Golden dreams: California in an age of abundance, 1950–1963*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009; *Coast of dreams: California on the edge, 1990–2003*, New York: Knopf, 2004.

The federal agents advertising affluence in the 1920s knew not only that swimming epitomized American bourgeois dreams but that the sport had an American Olympic star who had become a global icon. ‘That face and that body became as well-known in Outer Mongolia as on Michigan Avenue or Broadway and Forty-second Street’, marvelled the American sportswriter Paul Gallico, referring to the instantly and internationally recognizable figure of Johnny Weissmuller.⁶⁶ As a swimming star Weissmuller, who developed his aquatic talents in Chicago, earned five gold medals in swimming at the 1924 and 1928 Olympics. Pictures and newsreels of the dashing and well-muscled Weissmuller made him into a masculine sex symbol. He retired from competition shortly after the 1928 games and sought to capitalize on his good looks and fame, endorsing BVD swimsuits and searching out other celebrity opportunities. He moved from Chicago to star in a Florida aquatics show, eventually relocating to Hollywood where he looked for film roles. In 1929 he appeared in a cameo in the forgettable *Glorifying the American girl* as an unforgettable Adonis. Three years later he got his big break when he starred as the title character in the blockbuster MGM hit *Tarzan, the ape man*. The film established the Californized Weissmuller as an iconic cinematic legend who would star in a long series of Tarzan epics.⁶⁷ What better way, federal officials mused, for spreading American influence and selling American wares than using the epic body of Tarzan to promote worldwide the Californized notion that a pool in your backyard was the epitome of the good life?⁶⁸

The Californization of swimming to sell the republic of consumption in world markets represents an early example of the dis-invention of tradition in modern sports. The federal plan obscured the history of swimming, which, of course, did not suddenly emerge in California in the 1920s and 1930s. But the illusion provided a compelling if largely fictitious narrative for promoting Americanized conceptions of affluence abroad. Those conceptions were gilded by the clever Californization of promoting swimming as the emblem of the good life, a strategy that appealed to international audiences while masking the Americanizing designs on which the pitch rested. The campaigns to put baseball and American football in the Olympics presented the Olympic movement with clear cases of Americanization, and the IOC in that era fairly quickly rejected those efforts. The Californization of swimming provided a more subtle and compelling advertisement for affluence than the effort to include American national pastimes in the Olympics, as well as obscuring the national and imperial motives of the American government and the corporate agencies that endorsed the campaign.

The Los Angeles Olympics and the Californization of the Great Depression

Timing, as the old cliché admonishes, is everything. For Johnny Weissmuller, the move to California launched a stellar film career. For the federal plan designed in the late 1920s to

66 Paul Gallico, *The golden people*, New York: Doubleday, 1965, p. 231.

67 John Kieran, ‘Sports of the times’, *New York Times*, 2 March 1929; ‘Wallach Brothers advertisement’, *New York Times*, 15 July 1932; ‘Saks advertisement’, *New York Times*, 6 June 1931; ‘Weissmuller swims to films’, *Literary Digest*, 16 April 1932, pp. 18–19; Gallico, *Golden people*, pp. 219–34.

68 NACP, RG 151, sporting goods–Olympic Games, 1923–1931 file, and sporting goods–general file; RG 59, State Department decimal files 811.4063 Olympic Games, memoranda and correspondence.

promote California-style Americanization in global markets, the timing could not have been less fortuitous. A financial collapse and global depression that began in 1929 jolted the foundations of the republic of consumption. California itself suffered tremendously from the collapse, exposing the hollow promises of the republic of consumption. Yet the dreams of affluence that spawned the republic of consumption did not evaporate but remained to hundreds of millions incandescent if farther from their grasp during the depression. Californization not only survived but even thrived in spite of calamity.

The 1932 Olympics held in the California headquarters of visions of the good life became a beacon for hopes, however far-fetched, that prosperity would soon be restored. After some initial discussions about cancelling the games and admitting that the age of affluence had evaporated, the real estate baron Bill Garland, the film mogul Louis Mayer, and their California cabal soldiered on.⁶⁹ The organizers began to tout the Olympics as a ‘depression buster’, an event literally powerful enough to affect the national and even the global economy.⁷⁰

Garland grandly asserted that the Olympics would bring his new hometown \$10 million in free advertising.⁷¹ He himself reaped a major windfall from the games. The city spent \$100,000 to plant 30,000 palm trees to gussy up Los Angeles for its international debut, making this arboreal foreign species into an iconic symbol of southern California. The majority of the new palms sprouted along Wilshire Boulevard, the gateway to Garland’s real estate developments, adding considerable value to his holdings.⁷² Mayer joined Garland in seizing on the opportunity to profit from the Olympics: MGM and other studios sent legions of Hollywood film celebrities to the Olympics to pose for the assembled newsreel cameras and to promote both the movies and California.⁷³

The Olympics provided a stimulus to Mayer’s and Garland’s businesses and generated a minor boost to southern California but they were not the international depression-busting engine that was advertised. Nevertheless, in spite of the failing economy Los Angeles drew record numbers of spectators and produced the first operating profit in Olympic history.⁷⁴ The Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee (LAOOC) employed the games to promote an image of their city as a vibrant, modern metropolis. During the games, palm trees swayed in Pacific breezes, the huge volume of traffic flowed, Angeleños celebrated, and the urban infrastructure functioned smoothly. Whether these images matched everyday Los Angeles realities mattered little. The world witnessed a city that worked, producing an unparalleled marketing opportunity.⁷⁵

69 Jeremy White, ‘The Los Angeles way of doing things: the Olympic Village and the practice of boosterism’, *Olympika* 11, 2000, pp. 79–116; Sean Dinces, ‘Padres on Mount Olympus: Los Angeles and the production of the 1932 Olympic mega-event’, *Journal of Sport History*, 32, 2, 2005, pp. 137–66.

70 ‘Olympic Games as a depression buster’, *Literary Digest*, 18 June 1932, pp. 28–31.

71 Dinces, ‘Padres on Mount Olympus’, p. 144.

72 Robert Smaus, ‘An urban forest by 1984’, *Los Angeles Times*, 25 July 1982; Josine Ianco-Starrels, ‘Froned memories of L.A.’s palm trees’, *Los Angeles Times*, 29 July 1984.

73 ‘Picturing wild beasts’, *New York Times*, 27 March 1932; Mordaunt Hall, ‘The screen’, *New York Times*, 28 March 1932.

74 LA84, ‘In the matter of the funds realized’.

75 Dinces, ‘Padres on Mount Olympus’; Dyreson, ‘Marketing national identity’.

The LAOOC took advantage of the opportunity, broadcasting images of a thriving Los Angeles to global audiences.⁷⁶ Indeed, organizers for the upcoming 1936 Berlin Olympics who came to Los Angeles to scout how to stage the games left impressed by the LAOOC's masterful propaganda techniques.⁷⁷ As I have argued in earlier works, the committee marketed a 'California-style' spectacle that matched the blueprint drawn by federal officials in Washington, focusing on the glamorous sports of swimming and diving, among other events. Garland and his organizing team framed California as a paradise of play, a perfect backdrop for the Olympic festivities. Media coverage of the games depicted Olympians as the beautiful citizens of a new version of Eden, a modern utopia devoted to leisure.⁷⁸

The 1932 Olympics gave Californians an opportunity to design uniforms for the republic of consumption. Clothing companies used the Olympics to advertise sportswear and casual designs. Swimming, tennis, and golf costumes invaded everyday fashion in a brand-new array of bright 'California' colours.⁷⁹ With the Olympics on the horizon southern Californians also developed an entire magazine devoted to their affluent, athletic lifestyle, a glossy monthly entitled *Game and Gossip*. The magazine illustrated the attitudes of the republic of consumption, publishing features on sports, fashion, and show business. The Olympic numbers of *Game and Gossip* promoted Olympic-themed California casual wear and touted the region as the globe's new 'playground'.⁸⁰

Johnny Weissmuller, who had recently relocated from Chicago to this playground, starred at the Los Angeles Olympics – though his turn to aquacades and the movies rendered him ineligible to compete. Weissmuller was seemingly at every venue in Los Angeles, smiling and posing for the newsreel crews and the hordes of photographers. Just a few months before the Olympics commenced MGM had released *Tarzan*, making the Olympic swimmer into a global star. At the Los Angeles Olympics, scores of his fellow celebrities from Hollywood joined him at the games, cavorting with athletes and gathering the publicity that fuelled their careers. The Hollywood crowd added a starry sheen to the Olympian spectacle, transforming the games into an advertisement for the republic of consumption and temporarily dispelling the gloom of the Great Depression.⁸¹

Weissmuller, who according to the sporting press had transformed swimming from a 'colorless sport' into a global passion, helped to validate the American plan to Californize the world.⁸² The movie industry scouted the Olympics intensively in a quest to find the 'next' Tarzan, and talent agents signed several American Olympians to contracts following the

76 Emerson Spencer, 'Records crashed and heroes soared', *Game and Gossip*, September 1932, pp. 22, 44; Bill Wise, 'Afterglow of the Olympiad', *Game and Gossip*, September 1932, pp. 13, 46–8; idem, 'Behind the Xth Olympiad', *Game and Gossip*, 10, October 1932, pp. 7, 38–41; Xth Olympiad Committee, *The Games of the Xth Olympiad*.

77 Dinces, 'Pardres on Mount Olympus'.

78 Dyreson, *Crafting patriotism*; idem, 'Endless bid', pp. 26–39.

79 Sue Fleishman, 'Made in California', *California History*, 63, 1, 1984, pp. 80–3.

80 Paul Ivar, 'Olympian motifs sway fashions of autumn', *Game and Gossip*, August 1932, pp. 32–3; Grantland Rice, 'You're lucky California!', *Game and Gossip*, September 1932, pp. 9, 41.

81 John Scott, 'Film celebrities to mix with crowds at games', *Los Angeles Times*, 31 July 1932; Alma Whitaker, 'Society seethes with sparkling functions', *Los Angeles Times*, 6 August 1932; Bob Ray, 'Japanese take honors in swimming events', *Los Angeles Times*, 7 August 1932.

82 Gallico, *Golden people*, pp. 223–4.

closing ceremonies.⁸³ In the wake of the Los Angeles Olympic extravaganza, some speculated that the quickest route to film stardom was a successful Olympic career.⁸⁴ A new American swimming sensation, Clarence ‘Buster’ Crabbe, catapulted from the Olympic pool into a long career in Hollywood serials and ‘B’ movies, debuting as an imitation of Tarzan in *The lion man* and achieving minor stardom as the science-fiction heroes Flash Gordon and Buck Rodgers.⁸⁵ Crabbe, who grew up in Hawaii before moving to Los Angeles in early adulthood to swim and pursue an acting career, reflected many years later that the one-tenth of a second by which he won a gold medal in Los Angeles ‘changed my life’.⁸⁶ Though never the celebrity nor even the swimmer that Weissmuller was, he became a supporting actor in a burgeoning tradition of Olympic Californization. In 1932, ‘California cool’ and the Olympics blended seamlessly in Los Angeles.

The evolution of Olympic brands of California cool since 1932

Thereafter, Californization continued its global spread via Olympic stages in uneven spurts. The 1936 Olympics in Berlin borrowed a great deal from the Los Angeles games, continuing both the merger of cinema and sport and the practice of promoting particular cultures to global audiences, but Nazification rather than Californization dominated the German spectacle. The Second World War then scuttled Olympian mega-events for more than a decade, bringing Olympic Californization to a temporary halt. In the long run, however, the war dramatically enlarged and energized the American republic of consumption in general and Californization in particular. From the beginning of the Cold War in the 1940s to its conclusion in the 1990s, California provided dazzling images of the American culture of affluence to the globe’s masses, whether they lived behind iron or bamboo curtains or in front of them.

As the Cold War magnified the power of the Olympic stage in the ideological struggles between the American-led West and its rivals, California continued to develop as the centre of both the American Olympic enterprise and the locus of American exports of popular culture. Los Angeles bid for every summer Olympics from 1952 until they won again and hosted the 1984 games.⁸⁷ The city’s boosters also won the 1960 Olympic Winter Games for Squaw Valley, then a little-known ski area on the eastern border of the state, tucked into the Lake Tahoe region. Walt Disney, the Los Angeles entertainment mogul, staged the sets for Squaw Valley’s winter extravaganza from the opening through to the closing ceremony, further evidence that Californization once again hummed through Olympian spectacles.

83 Muriel Babcock, ‘Olympic champions hear siren song of screen’, *Los Angeles Times*, 7 August 1932; ‘Movie move by Madison’, *Los Angeles Times*, 15 August 1932; Grace Kingsley, ‘Olympic stars take tests’, *Los Angeles Times*, 25 August 1932.

84 Erskine Johnson and Victor G. Sidler, ‘The quickest way into the movies’, *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 1932.

85 Jerry Belcher, ‘Buster Crabbe, athlete, hero of serials, dies’, *Los Angeles Times*, 24 April 1983; Grace Kingsley, ‘Studio looks for Hercules’, *Los Angeles Times*, 8 September 1932; ‘Crabbe given picture job as lion man’, *Los Angeles Times*, 2 November 1932; Philip K. Scheur, ‘“Lion man” makes debut’, *Los Angeles Times*, 11 March 1933.

86 William Overend, ‘Buster Crabbe recalls ’32 Olympics’, *Los Angeles Times*, 10 October 1977.

87 Dyreson, ‘Endless bid’, pp. 26–39.

These games signalled the post-Second World War shift of the American ski industry from venerable eastern resorts such as Lake Placid, New York, to the American West.⁸⁸ That shift occurred at the same time as American skiing broadened its consumer base from the wealthy leisure classes to middle-class masses.⁸⁹

California won the 1960 winter Olympics and the 1984 summer games in large part because the inhabitants of the state nurtured the special bond that they believed had been forged in 1932 between their culture and the Olympic movement. Since that time, California has contributed more per capita – in money, athletes, leadership, and energy – to the American Olympic cause than any other region. A Los Angeles baker who had provided the ‘official Olympic’ loaves of bread for the 1932 games, Paul Helms, opened an Olympic shrine in 1936 in Culver City, in the shadows of southern California’s film studios. The Helms Foundation promoted the Olympics relentlessly. Such an organization, noted a journalist for a national magazine in the 1950s, ‘could have happened nowhere but in Southern California’.⁹⁰ Helms and his organization sparked the 1939 creation of the Southern California Olympic Organizing Committee (SCOOG), a cabal that also included the city’s film moguls, media gurus, and political leaders. SCOOG served as a permanent bid committee in the never-ending quests to return the Olympics to the ‘Golden State’.⁹¹

As SCOOG worked its magic, Californian athletes, coaches, and promoters played even greater roles in American Olympic teams than they had before the Second World War. California became the training ground for a multitude of Olympians, not only in swimming and diving but also in track and field and other sports, who, whether natives or migrants, advertised the ‘Golden State’ as the source of their golden Olympic prowess. Some of the athletes followed the trails blazed by Paddock, Weissmuller, and Crabbe into Hollywood productions. In 1984, just a few years after the 1976 Olympic decathlon champion and California immigrant Bruce Jenner had ‘starred’ with the disco group the Village People in the imminently forgettable *Can’t stop the music* (1980),⁹² the Olympics returned to Los Angeles after the only other city seeking those games, Teheran, bowed out in the wake of the 1979 Islamic revolution.

The second Los Angeles Olympics, the penultimate Cold War games, once again celebrated American affluence and triumphalism, as the city for the second time promoted its global image through the games. A California public relations firm proclaimed that since their original Olympian experience southern Californians had sought to serve as the ‘style-setting center of the world’.⁹³ The 1932 Los Angeles Olympics forged a link between sport, celebrity, and fashion that helped make ‘California cool’ into a global commodity. The 1984

88 Evan Hill, ‘California’s Olympic bonanza’, *Saturday Evening Post*, 13 February 1960, pp. 26–7, 103–4; Robert Wernick, ‘West to the Sierra’, *Sports Illustrated*, 23 November 1959, pp. 74–85.

89 Annie Gilbert Coleman, *Ski style: sport and culture in the Rockies*, Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2004.

90 Joel Sayre, ‘Mr. Helm’s happy hobby’, *Sports Illustrated*, 19 November 1956, pp. 109–15.

91 LA84, ‘The Southern California Committee for the Olympic Games invites you to become a member of the advisory board’.

92 *Can’t Stop the Music*, EMI Films, 1980, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0080492/> (consulted 11 September 2012.)

93 Richard Lillard, ‘International city’, *California History*, 63, 1, 1984, p. 54.

games guaranteed that that arc would continue, cementing the games as the centrepiece of global consumption of sports spectacles.

As in 1932, the quest to advertise California and its culture, to generate tourism and commerce, and to confirm California's status as the 'style centre' of the world took precedence in staging the Olympics. This time the games were staged not by a real estate agent but by a travel industry executive who had migrated to California from the suburbs of Chicago, Peter Ueberroth, with the Hollywood television and movie mogul David Wolper taking Louis Mayer's role as the entertainment-industry insider backing the Olympic show.⁹⁴ Ueberroth, Wolper, and the Los Angeles organizers even revitalized the iconic palm forest originally planted for the 1932 games.⁹⁵

The 1984 Los Angeles games organizers put consumption at the centre of their Olympic production, underwriting costs by signing a host of corporate sponsors to exclusive advertising deals and enhancing the broadcasting revenues garnered from television contracts. Indeed, the republic of consumption so thoroughly dominated the staging of the 1984 Olympics that domestic and international critics delighted in condemning the over-commercialization of the spectacle. But allowing the Olympics to become a global advertising platform created more than \$220 million profit and revitalized an Olympic movement that had floundered in red ink since the 1960s. In addition, California economists estimated that the games had generated more than \$2.3 billion for the state's economy. Los Angeles created a new model and made the Olympics once again an attractive commodity sought after by cities and nations who desired global exposure.⁹⁶

The 1984 Olympics also sparked a new chapter in Californization efforts. The 'style-setting centre of the world' staged the first action-sports competition, when men (women only took part in an exhibition regatta) from around the world competed for windsurfing gold. As the Cold War wound down, more Californized sports popped up on the Olympic programme – beach volleyball and mountain biking in 1996, snowboarding in 1998, triathlon in 2000, and BMX cycling in 2008. With the globalization of these California-incubated sports, Californians celebrated the power and influence of their region on the world stage, and they developed their own strain of American exceptionalism when it came to interpreting the meaning of the Olympics for their state. The journalist Richard Hoffer penned a homage to his adopted state during a preview of American prospects for the 1992 Barcelona Olympics in which he argued that California would have finished fourth in the gold medal count at the 1988 Seoul Olympics if the state was counted as a separate nation. Only the Soviet Union, East Germany, and the California-less United States won more gold medals than the fifteen the 'Golden State' harvested in South Korea.⁹⁷ In a preview of the 2004 Athens Olympics the California native and reporter Michael Silver made a similar

94 Peter Ueberroth, with Richard Levin and Amy Quinn, *Made in America: his own story*, New York: William Morrow, 1985.

95 Smaus, 'Urban forest'.

96 Robert K. Barney, Stephen R. Wenn, and Scott G. Martyn, *Selling the five rings: the International Olympic Committee and the rise of Olympic commercialism*, Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 2004; Kenneth Reich, *Making it happen: Peter Ueberroth and the 1984 Olympics*, Santa Barbara, CA: Capra, 1986; LA 84, Los Angeles Organizing Committee, 'Executive summary: community economic impact of the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles and southern California', October 1984.

97 Richard Hoffer, 'The golden state', *Sports Illustrated*, 22 July 1992, pp. 34–40.

claim: 'Indeed, if the heartland's killer-quake fantasy ever came true, and the Golden State split off into the Pacific, the Island Republic of California would win more medals at the Olympics than all but two or three other nations', he crowed.⁹⁸

The testimonies to California's exceptionalism identified California lifestyles, especially swimming pools and beaches, as the source of the region's Olympian prowess. Olympic beach volleyball and California lifestyles developed a particularly strong symbiosis. Media accounts of the Olympic beach game swelled with discourses on bikinis and breast implants.⁹⁹ Olympians posed for *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit editions.¹⁰⁰ The same magazine decried the potential Californization of what it perceived as inappropriate spaces: in its long-running 'This week's sign of the apocalypse', it complained that the 'Beijing organizers have designated Tiananmen Square – site of the government's brutal suppression of pro-democracy demonstrators in 1989 – as the beach volleyball venue'.¹⁰¹ In fact, Chinese organizers avoided a beach volleyball spectacle at Tiananmen Square when they built a temporary stadium for the event in Chaoyang Park instead.¹⁰² Four years later in London, California style invaded the heart of the old British empire and took over St James's Park for a fortnight.

Assessing the influence of Californization on the Olympic movement

The Olympic Californization that has materialized recently in London, Beijing, and other venues dates to the 1920s and 1930s when American government agents, corporate executives, and Olympic boosters began to link visions of affluence and invitations for consumption to images of California lifestyles. For the federal bureaucrats, corporate merchants, and sports administrators who designed the original campaign, Californization represented a method for Americanizing the global Olympic movement during an era in which the IOC and international fans manifested little enthusiasm for incorporating American pastimes such as baseball and football into the Olympic line-up. Their designs were a part of a broader campaign to use global Olympic venues for Americanization.

Traditional American national pastimes such as baseball and football failed to establish permanent footholds in the Olympic movement in that era. Baseball gained some support from other nations in this period but would have to wait until 1984, ironically in Los Angeles, for another shot as a demonstration sport, and until 1992 (ironically just as the original US 'dream team' took the Olympic basketball court in Barcelona to global fanfare) to become a medal sport. In 2005 the IOC booted baseball out of the Olympics, in part as a reaction to criticisms that the USA exercised too much influence on Olympian spectacles.¹⁰³ American football continues to baffle audiences beyond the USA and has never had a chance

98 Michael Silver, 'Dream state', *Sports Illustrated*, 5 July 2004, pp. 36–42.

99 Michael Farber, 'Fun in the sun', *Sports Illustrated*, 5 August 1996, pp. 88–95.

100 Michael Silver, 'Beauty and the beach', *Sports Illustrated*, 21 February 1997, pp. 216–31.

101 'This week's sign of the apocalypse', *Sports Illustrated*, 4 December 2000, p. 36.

102 'Beijing Chaoyang Park', *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaoyang_Park (consulted 18 October 2012).

103 Bob Hohler, 'Olympic world turns with ever-less American influence', *Boston Globe*, 20 February 2006.

to win a place in the Olympic programme, despite rumblings from National Football League promoters that the game ‘absolutely’ belongs in the Olympics.¹⁰⁴ Basketball, which did earn a roster spot in 1936, at that time lacked the global appeal or even the national passion to serve the grand designs that these bureaucrats and capitalists had for selling the United States through Olympic sports.

In swimming, the American agents found a more pliable vehicle for Americanization, one that, if ‘colourless’, was well established in the Olympics and did not immediately arouse the suspicions of other nations leery of US imperialism. Californizing swimming added the ‘colour’ necessary to make it an attractive spectacle for consumption, while at the same time obscuring older histories of swimming and softening the promoters’ Americanizing intentions. Johnny Weissmuller, a Chicago boy transformed by Californization, became one of the first Olympians who advertised ‘California cool’ and the American republic of consumption on Olympic stages. Weissmuller became a global icon – a ‘face and body’ as instantly recognizable in ‘Outer Mongolia’ as in the USA. Californizing Olympic swimming made it an enduring Olympic spectacle, with a cast of celebrities who for many decades have symbolized youth, beauty, virility, and other essential elements of ‘cool’. Some of these celebrity swimmers have been Californians (such as Mark Spitz), while others have emerged from different parts of the USA (including the Baltimore native Michael Phelps) and from different parts of the world (such as the Australians Ian Thorpe and Dawn Fraser, and the East Germans Kristin Otto and Kornelia Ender).

The ‘dis’-invention of tradition accomplished by American agents who Californized swimming made the sport an excellent vehicle for soft-peddalling American visions of a social order unified by consumption. Half a century later, in a world still attuned to the realities of American imperialism, action sports that market California cool began to navigate the path to Olympic inclusion, while baseball briefly made an appearance and then fell out of favour and American football remains beyond the pale. Dropping baseball (and softball) from the Olympic roster removed opportunities to use two potential medals in Americanization schemes. Adding action sports has created dozens of new medal possibilities to ‘sell the United States to the rest of the world’ – as the AOC leader Robert Thompson pithily put it in the 1920s. Like Olympic swimming, the masking of particular local and national histories of the origins of these action sports has made them globally attractive commodities. Like aquatic sports, action sports represent a multi-billion-dollar global industry that relies on the desires of consumers for the lifestyles these pastimes evoke. Thus, Californization represents a more historically effective strategy for promoting the republic of consumption in the Olympic movement than other forms of Americanization.

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104 Will Brinson, ‘Roger Goodell: American football should “absolutely” be an Olympic sport’, <http://www.cbssports.com/nfl/blog/eye-on-football/19719275/roger-goodell-american-football-should-absolutely-be-an-olympic-sport> (consulted 10 March 2013); Albert Breer, ‘Football in the Olympics is a dream that could become a reality’, <http://www.nfl.com/news/story/09000d5d82acf42b/article/football-in-olympics-is-a-dream-that-could-become-a-reality> (consulted 10 March 2013).