Modern sport is today the single most important form of leisure across the globe. In participation and in spectatorship, sports excite the passions of billions of people, with profound effects on everyday lives, on moral ideas, on views of the body, race, and gender, on the individual and society, and on conceptions of time and space. International competitions like the Olympic Games and soccer’s World Cup are behemoths in global affairs, generating capital flows in the billions of dollars and producing powerful cultural and political reverberations. Sport is not just play, separate from “real life”; it is intertwined with matters of serious import at the local, national, and international levels.

In the aftermath of the First World War, modern Western sport spread with great rapidity across the globe, stifling or co-opting other forms of physical culture, becoming more deeply entwined with notions of nationhood and national power, and developing powerful international institutions. As the world’s leader in many amateur sports and as a strongly sport-minded nation that served as a model to others, the United States both directly and indirectly hastened the spread of modern sport and helped to shape the form and character of the growing number of international sports competitions. Despite the Depression, the Los Angeles organizers of the 1932 Olympic Games staged a highly successful event that gave a huge boost to the global mass popularity of the Olympics and stamped the Games as a commercialized entertainment extravaganza that went well beyond mere sporting feats. Throughout the rest

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of the decade, ever-greater numbers of international sport tours facilitated exchanges of ideas and techniques between Americans and foreign athletes as other countries sought to replicate American success. Although the Americans who led these exchanges opposed foreign political entanglements, they were eager internationalists in the realm of sport—indeed, for these Americans, political isolationism went hand in hand with an aggressive, idealistic internationalism in the cultural sphere. They were convinced that the popularization of sport was an effective means of spreading their own values and ideas, and they framed their participation in international sport as a moral crusade to spread peace and democracy.

In examining the American influence on international sport in the 1930s, this essay tackles two subjects that have received little attention from diplomatic historians in the United States: the connections between sports and foreign affairs, and cultural relations in the 1930s. In doing so it argues for the importance of sport as an element of international relations and for the importance of cultural integration even in a conflict-ridden decade often seen as little more than a prelude to the Second World War. That the United States enlarged its

4. This attitude was similar to the business-based internationalism of the 1920s, according to which Americans would transform the world by spreading prosperity, not by meddling in politics. Barry Dean Karl, The Uneasy State: The United States from 1915 to 1945 (Chicago, 1983).

5. One important exception is Walter LaFeber, whose recent Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism (New York, 1999) placed sport at the center of an American-dominated commercial and media empire. The general neglect of sport in studies of foreign relations has a number of possible causes. First, an intellectual tradition of disdain for matters of the body marginalized sport studies in many disciplines until about the 1980s. Whereas other disciplines and other fields of history (especially social history) have since made sport a respectable and highly fruitful subject of study, American diplomatic history is famously slow to respond to new trends. Second, whereas other countries have long regarded sport as an affair of state, American culture continues to revere sport as existing, at least in ideal terms, in a realm of purity, free from political and economic “taint”—hence perhaps of little interest to historians of foreign relations, concerned above all with finding political connections. Third, although many U.S. foreign relations specialists have examined the influence of American culture abroad, sport is the one area where such “Americanization” seems (at first glance) more limited. Modern sport’s primarily British roots, its quick internationalization, the general unpopularity of baseball and football outside of the United States (with the exception, only recently, of basketball), and the enormous global appeal of soccer mean that the globalization of sport cannot easily be linked to Americanization. Studies of sports and foreign relations are more common in other countries; see, for example, Peter Beck, Scoring for Britain: International Football and International Politics, 1900–1939 (London, 1999) and Pierre Arnaud and Alfred Wahl, eds., Sports et relations internationales (Metz, 1994).

6. Surveys of cultural relations that cover the interwar years touch lightly, if at all, on the 1930s. Emily Rosenberg’s pioneering survey of economic and cultural expansion in the first half of the century states only that the Thirties saw a sharp contraction of America’s cultural influence. Emily S. Rosenberg, Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890–1945 (New York, 1982), 202–3. Frank Costigliola’s study of U.S. cultural, political, and economic influences in Europe ends in 1933; Costigliola, Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919–1933 (Ithaca, NY, 1984). Some elements of American popular culture, however, continued to have strong appeal abroad. Hollywood movies increased their dominance of the European market, and jazz infiltrated even the Nazi and Soviet dictatorships. Richard Pells, Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated,
influence on international sport during the thirties is surprising, in part because economic dislocation and the prevailing climate of political isolationism might have been expected to dampen such international cultural ties. At home, the economic catastrophe turned many Americans inward and hardened isolationist sentiment. Abroad, the devastating effects of the Depression eroded America’s attractiveness as a model of modernity, not just in economic but also in cultural terms. Moreover, economic woes diminished the resources and appetite of foreign publics for cultural products and helped trigger political developments, notably the rise of fascism, that were hostile to international exchange in general and to American cultural influence in particular.

The increase in sports ties is also surprising because sport appears to have been a striking exception to the global popularity of American popular culture. In the first half of the twentieth century, the world was largely impervious to the lure of baseball, football, and basketball, the major team sports in the United States, while soccer, a marginal sport in the United States, embarked on a rapid rise to global preeminence. Yet despite the inhospitable climate and the disconnect in team sports, the American engagement with global sport expanded rapidly in the 1930s, with profound consequences for the globalization of sport.

The United States did not export its major team sports, but it did export training techniques, a competitive, high-achievement ethos, and a moral underpinning of values that resonate with the ideals of democracy and democracy. The world of soccer, unlike the world of professional team sports, is international in a way that American baseball and football fans (despite the occasional foreign player and the misnomer “World Series”) would never have imagined. Thus, while soccer has internationalized much of the world’s population, American isolation from the global network in professional team sports has arguably reinforced, in daily lives and attitudes, the general isolationism and retreat from international engagement that often prevails in American thought. For an extended and intelligent argument about the uniqueness of the American sport experience, see Andrei Markovits and Steven L. Hellerman, Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism (Princeton, NJ, 2001).

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7. By “international sport” I mean both international sports competitions and the international “regime” of rules and regulations, set by international organizations, that governed those competitions.


9. The disjuncture between the United States and the rest of the world in professional team sports has not been without consequence. This is especially true because whereas most forms of cultural exchange are informal and decentralized, sports like soccer are governed by international organizations that require strict adherence to rules and norms. As a result, participation in soccer has knit much of the world into a global community that encourages an internationalist outlook among millions—even billions—of the world’s population. Soccer players have been traded across national borders since the inception of professional leagues in Europe in the 1920s, and frequent binational meets and international championships have given soccer fans high exposure to foreign teams and players. The mental map of a soccer fan in the twentieth century was international in a way that American baseball and football fans (despite the occasional foreign player and the misnomer “World Series”) would never have imagined. Thus, while soccer has internationalized much of the world’s population, American isolation from the global network in professional team sports has arguably reinforced, in daily lives and attitudes, the general isolationism and retreat from international engagement that often prevails in American thought. For an extended and intelligent argument about the uniqueness of the American sport experience, see Andrei Markovits and Steven L. Hellerman, Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism (Princeton, NJ, 2001).
ning that helped cement a remarkably durable legitimization for international sports contests.

The American influence on international sport in the 1930s was also significant beyond the world of sport. In the thirties it was the dictatorships far more than the democracies that recognized the potential political value of international sport. Hitler, Mussolini, and Japanese nationalists eagerly sought political gain through success in international sports competitions, while in the United States politicians and diplomats awoke only slowly to sport’s political ramifications. Yet even on an overt level Americans could not keep sport free from politics, as was most vividly seen in the huge public debate over participation in the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. Moreover, as international sports events grew in number and in visibility, American participation helped to shape foreign views of the United States and the “American way of life” and influenced Americans’ perceptions of their country’s power and place in the world. At the same time, involvement in sport affairs abroad pulled American sports promoters into a multinational network, inculcating an internationalist outlook, subjecting them to international rules and norms, and undermining their often fervent beliefs in isolationism. Closely entwined with other elements of American culture such as Hollywood movies, sport was an integral part of the package of American exports that shaped foreign cultures. American participation in international sport also had economic effects, boosting tourism and international trade. At its most fundamental level, the American influence catalyzed the transformation of international sport from an elite cultural pursuit to a mass cultural phenomenon based on commercialism and the new consumer culture, boosting sport’s popularity and laying the foundation for sport’s emergence in the Cold War as a global force of major cultural, economic, and political import.

The single greatest contribution of the United States to the development of international sport before World War II was the staging of the 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. Extraordinarily successful despite the Depression, the 1932 Games marked the transformation of the Olympics from a relatively marginal and elitist event into an entertainment extravaganza with wide popular appeal. In pageantry, public interest, and sport performances the 1932 Games marked a quantum leap over the festivals of the 1920s. At a time when the host city’s organizing committee was largely responsible for the character and success of the Games, the Los Angeles organizers put a distinctively American imprint on the festival, greatly expanding international sport’s connections to the world of entertainment, consumerism, and mass media.

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10. I cover here only the Summer Games, as the Winter Games, begun only in 1924, were much smaller-scale affairs. The United States had hosted the Olympics for the first time in 1904 at St. Louis, in what was widely regarded as a stupendous failure.

11. Perhaps because the 1936 Berlin Olympics have drawn so much attention, the significance of the Los Angeles Games has been largely overlooked by sports historians.
Already in the 1920s the Olympics were becoming major events, their growth fueled by the explosion of mass spectator sport. The Games had established a reputation as the pinnacle of amateur sporting achievement, and the terms “Olympic champion” and “Olympic record” were filtering into everyday vocabulary. At Antwerp in 1920, Paris in 1924, and Amsterdam in 1928, the competitions were drawing around three thousand participants in nearly twenty sports from roughly forty countries, almost entirely European. Organizing committees spent years preparing for the costly event, raising large sums of money to build or remodel facilities. They also undertook extensive publicity efforts, printing hundreds of thousands of posters, stamps, postcards, announcements, programs, and travel brochures for international dissemination in several languages. Hundreds of thousands of spectators—in 1928 the total was over half a million—thronged the events, and with the advent of sport tourism, thousands of foreign visitors flooded hotels in Olympic cities.

The 1932 Olympics were secured for Los Angeles in 1923 by a group of businessmen who were less interested in sport than in what they presciently recognized as an “advertising” opportunity, a means to raise the profile both at home and abroad of America’s fastest-growing city. Led by real-estate magnate William May Garland, the Games’ backers included film studio executives such as Louis B. Mayer of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) and the publishers of the three major Los Angeles newspapers, who saw the Olympics as a way to encourage migration to the area, increase tourism, and promote business. With vocal support from political leaders, state and city voters approved million-dollar bond issues to fund new construction and renovation of facilities. Even the onset of the Depression as preparations got underway did not result in the scaling back of grandiose plans.

In the years of preparing for the event, Garland’s Organizing Committee took on all the usual tasks—building and renovating sites for the events, printing and mailing out invitations and rulebooks—but it also brought zeal and expertise to a new realm: the production of the Games as spectacle. Here the Americans drew on the skills that had made the United States the world leader in mass culture: skills of organization, press and public relations, advertising, salesmanship, and promotion. Far surpassing the flawed efforts of the Dutch

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13. See, for example, the list in *Budget 1922, Jeux Olympiques 1924*, International Olympic Committee Archives, Lausanne, Switzerland [hereafter IOC Archives].
organizers of the 1928 Amsterdam Games, the Los Angeles group set up a system designed to maximize satisfaction for spectators and the press. Whereas the Amsterdam organizers sold tickets through a confusing and inconvenient mail-in system that generated many complaints, Garland’s staff created an elaborate and highly efficient system of phone banks and new technologies to oversee ticket sales to the 117 individual events. Spurred by excellent marketing and relatively low prices (one or two dollars for most events), ticket sales soared even in the face of the Depression. Even without a major team sport, the Los Angeles Games attracted a record 1.25 million paying spectators, twice the number that had attended in 1928. The majority of these were Americans, but visitors from at least fifty other countries attended the events, bringing in gate money to the tune of $1.5 million and giving the Games a substantial surplus, which was returned to state and local governments. The American organizers’ adroit management of publicity and press relations ensured wide public interest in the Games and enabled the media to feed that interest. Almost the first action taken by Garland’s team was the formation in 1929 of a Press Department, which disseminated information to the world press. Billed as “the first systematic world news service during the preparatory period of an Olympiad,” the department worked hard to increase worldwide interest in the years leading up to the Games, enlisting the aid of foreign consuls, steamship and railroad offices, and the U.S. Department of Commerce to compile a mailing list of six thousand foreign periodicals. The motion-picture industry also helped publicize the Games. Cinema idols Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. and Mary Pickford, long fans of the Olympics who counted many star athletes as friends, were among the stars who broadcast a worldwide appeal to attend the Games, and studios produced short subjects about the Olympics that helped stimulate public interest abroad.

16. Netherlands Olympic Committee, The Ninth Olympiad: Official Report of the Olympic Games of 1928 Celebrated at Amsterdam, ed. G. Van Rossem, trans. Sydney W. Fleming (Amsterdam, 1929), 940–1; Games of the Xth Olympiad, 89–166. According to Wolf Lyberg, at the 1928 Games “nothing seemed to have worked as it should, and schedules were not adhered to particularly, to the great annoyance of the press which had deadlines to meet.” Lyberg, Fabulous 100 Years, 199.

17. Total attendance in Amsterdam (with a much smaller main stadium) had been about 660,000, with soccer being the main draw. Soccer was not included in Los Angeles due to a dispute over amateurism between the international soccer federation and the International Olympic Committee. New York Times, 17 July 1932, III, 8.

18. Ibid.; Lyberg, Fabulous 100 Years, 248; Allen Guttmann, The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games, 2d ed. (Urbana, IL, 2002), 52. An early, conservative estimate predicted 325,000 visitors from outside the region: Los Angeles Times, 17 July 1932, II, 4. For more on the surplus see the correspondence from Combs to Kirby and Brundage, 1933–1935, in Gustavus Town Kirby papers, Box 1, United States Olympic Committee Archives, Colorado Springs, Colorado [hereafter USOC Archives]; Garland to Baillet-Latour, 30 March 1933, Correspondance du COJO, Jeux Olympiques d’été 1932, IOC Archives.


The advance publicity helped draw over nine hundred journalists to cover the Games—half again as many as had covered the Amsterdam Games. The Los Angeles group devoted far more attention and resources to press management than had the Dutch, creating what press representatives called “the finest Press arrangements ever provided for any event of world magnitude.”21 Vastly improving on the telephone booths and telegraph facilities that had been provided in Amsterdam, the Los Angeles committee put in place a highly sophisticated communications system, with hundreds of telephones, a novel system of Dow-Jones electric writing machines for disseminating results quickly and accurately, and hundreds of teletype machines for reporters.22 The efforts paid off in the miles of column ink devoted to Olympic coverage in the United States and abroad.23 Other media got into the act as well, as movie newsreels recorded every phase of the Games for international audiences.24 Radio, making its Olympic debut, was the one area where organizers stumbled. Hollywood moguls, fearing the newer medium as a rival to film, pressured organizers to limit radio coverage to summaries of results and interviews with athletes rather than live broadcasts.25

The misstep over radio notwithstanding, Hollywood's connection to the Games provided enormous benefits, including financial backing and a hefty dose of glamour and celebrity. It tightened international sport's ties to other realms of entertainment and culture, reinforcing the idea that athletes, like movie stars, were fundamentally entertainers and helping to democratize the Olympics by integrating them into mass culture. At previous Olympics kings and queens had opened the ceremonies and aristocrats had staffed official positions. In Los Angeles, it was “the royalty of the screen” who lent the Games cachet. MGM's Mayer threw a party at his studios where Olympic guests toured the facilities and lunched with film stars. At Fox Studios comedian Will Rogers hosted a luncheon and tour for female athletes. Fairbanks and Pickford held a formal dinner at their estate for Olympic dignitaries. Throughout the Games, movie stars, studio executives, athletes, Olympic officials, and local politicians mingled

21. Games of the Xth Olympiad, 166. Roughly five hundred of the journalists were American, according to a clipping from L'Auto, 6 August 1932, in Articles de presse 1931–2, Jeux Olympiques d'été 1932, IOC Archives.
22. The 840-page official report of the 1932 Games has considerable detail on these technical arrangements. Games of the Xth Olympiad, 89–166.
23. Judging from a sampling of the Italian sports newspaper, La Gazzetta dello sport, the French papers Le Temps, Le Matin, and l'Echo de Paris, and the British dailies The Times of London and The Daily Mail, the European press provided comprehensive coverage of sports performances in L.A., especially performances of the national team. Other aspects of the Games were mentioned infrequently, but the organization and administration of the events was nearly universally praised.
in swank California nightclubs. Gary Cooper, Bing Crosby, Cary Grant, and the Marx brothers were among the spectators at the events. The “cult of celebrity” applied as well to athletes, who increasingly were making the jump to celluloid fame. Earlier in the year MGM had released its first Tarzan film, starring former Olympic swimming champion Johnny Weissmuller. The Games had hardly ended when Paramount Pictures auditioned twenty Olympic athletes in search of a jungle hero to rival Tarzan. The final choice was swimming gold-medalist Buster Crabbe, who went on to a long acting career as Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers.

The United States was home not only to Hollywood and its globally popular cinematic fare; it was also pioneering mass advertising at the time. It is not surprising, then, that despite the Los Angeles organizers’ avowed commitment “to keep . . . the Games on a true Olympic basis devoid of professional activities and commercialism,” they presided over a sharp expansion in the commercializ-
tion of the Olympics. Businesses from clothiers to cigarette makers had sought to capitalize on the Olympic phenomenon from its earliest years, buying advertising space in programs, printing booklets combining advertising with information about the Olympics, and selling or giving away products or novelty souvenirs. For a brief moment, at the 1924 Paris Olympics, advertising had even wormed its way into the stadium, and athletes competed before Ovalmaltine, Cinzano, and Dubbonnet posters until the International Olympic Committee voted to prevent further such displays within Olympic venues.\(^{31}\) American companies had been among the first to recognize the advertising potential of the Games: the Eastman Kodak Company had placed an ad in the Book of Official Results at the very first Olympics in 1896, and at the 1924 Games Kodak had supplied film to professional photographers.\(^{32}\)

Such efforts expanded in 1932 as American companies devised ingenious ways to “market” the Olympics, in the process moving Olympic marketing toward a focus on products aimed at the masses rather than the upper classes.\(^{33}\) Auto supply stores, railroad lines, hotels, tire manufacturers, and gasoline and electric supply companies were among the vendors distributing items ranging from stickers to paper-holders, and companies such as Kellogg’s Pep Bran Flakes, Weiss Binoculars, Safeway, and Piggly Wiggly inaugurated major Olympic-themed advertising campaigns.\(^{34}\) “Olympic” seat cushions, “Olympic” hot dogs, “Olympic” soft drinks were hawked everywhere in Los Angeles.\(^{35}\) An especially enterprising bread company obtained the contract to supply the Olympic Village and secured rights to market itself as the “official” Olympic bread company, an honor it again won for the ’36 Games.\(^{36}\)

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30. Games of the Xth Olympiad, 175, 220.
33. This generalization is based on a comparison of the publications of the 1928 and 1932 Games held at the IOC Archives: Programmes officiels, De Olympiade, Jeux Olympiques d’été 1928; and Rapports, règlement et programme officiel, Jeux Olympiques d’été 1932.
34. Item nos. 0084029, 0060826, 0060964, 0061498, 0061501, 0061532, 0069485 in the International Olympic Committee’s Département Collections/Expositions, Lausanne, Switzerland; Games of the Xth Olympiad, 173–5, 216–20; Postal History and Vignettes of the Xth Olympiad, Los Angeles, 1932, and the III. Winter Olympic Games (Cleveland, OH, 1976), 164–173; Mark Dyreson, “Marketing National Identity: The Olympic Games of 1932 and American Culture,” Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic Studies 4 (1995), 26–7. The Los Angeles Organizing Committee took in some revenue from the sale of programs (without advertisements) and concessions sold in the stands (sandwiches, soft drinks, candies, tobacco, souvenirs, and paper umbrellas and seat pads), but did not take a share of the profits of other novelties and souvenirs that were tied to the Olympics. Games of the Xth Olympiad, 173–5, 216–20.
was Jane Fauntz, a bronze-medalist in springboard diving in 1932, who turned down movie offers but went on to endorse Wheaties cereal and Camel cigarettes.\footnote{Buck Dawson, \textit{Mermaids on Parade: America's Love Affair with Its First Women Swimmers} (Huntington, NY, 2000), 151, 160.}

In 1928 the Coca-Cola Company had begun what would become a long-running and profitable corporate relationship with the Olympics. As part of its efforts to expand its presence beyond Britain onto the Continent, the Company’s new Foreign Department sent a thousand cases of the soft drink along with the U.S. Olympic team to Amsterdam, where special Coca-Cola\textsuperscript{®} kiosks staffed by vendors with Coca-Cola\textsuperscript{®} caps and coats wooed more customers than competing “health drinks.”\footnote{Palazzini, \textit{Coca-Cola Superstar}, 32; Paul Arnoldussen, \textit{Amsterdam 1928: Het verhaal van de IXe Olympiade} (Amsterdam, 1994), 196–7. Thanks to Jeff Vanke for a translation of the latter. See also International Olympic Committee, Department of Communications, Public Information Factsheet, “Long-Time Worldwide Olympic Partners (TOP),” 12 March 2002.} This effort paled beside the huge campaign Coke launched in 1932. Over two hundred teenagers in white jackets and gloves handed out Coke to spectators at the Coliseum; billboards urged the public to drink Coke and buy tickets to the Olympics, and across the United States the company distributed three million disks showing Olympic records and the company logo.\footnote{“Coca-Cola and the Olympic Movement,” supra note 28.}

That the Games were not just about sport but also about commerce was clear to the wide mix of business, military, and political leaders from Europe, the Americas, and Japan who came to Los Angeles to mingle business and pleasure. J. Sigfrid Edström, a wealthy Swedish industrialist, was a prominent example of the many businessmen who saw international trade and international sport as mutually profitable. President of the Swedish General Electric Corporation and vice president of the International Chamber of Commerce in Paris, Edström also held the presidency of the international track-and-field federation and was a member of the International Olympic Committee’s powerful Executive Committee. Though Edström called his visit to California a vacation, he spoke about international business affairs with the \textit{Los Angeles Times}, which carried news of his arrival on the front page.\footnote{Los Angeles Times, 26 July 1932, 1.} The Games also drew businessmen of a less savory type, like Chicago gangster Edward “Spike” O’Donnell, who arrived in town, he told police, “to attend the Olympic Games and go to church.”\footnote{Los Angeles Times, 4 August 1932, 2.}
Foreign businessmen used their Olympic sojourns to investigate American methods in aviation, textile manufacturing, refrigeration, fish- and fruit-packing, bakeries, tire and automobile companies, banks, radio, and agricultural and oil-well machinery. Local businessmen reported new connections to markets in Europe, Latin America, and Asia. The committee formed by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce to facilitate such connections and stimulate international trade gained five hundred registrants, who found abundant social opportunities for making new business contacts.43 The city’s *haute-monde* postponed annual retreats to summer homes to throw dozens of breakfasts, dinners, teas, concerts, ship entertainments, dances, beach parties, and garden fetes for Olympic visitors.44 One group of distinguished Japanese guests was reported to

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be attending three or four parties a day.\textsuperscript{45} Local businesses catering to the tourist trade experienced a welcome boom during the Games, as out-of-state and international visitors flooded the city by car and train.\textsuperscript{46}

At a time when the military in many countries provided significant numbers of the competitors at the Olympic Games, top military brass also mingled at Olympic social affairs, like the party thrown by Britain’s Rear Admiral and Lady Drax, which was attended by U.S. admirals Leigh and McNamanee, several U.S. Army colonels, the British and French consuls, Governor James Rolph, Jr. of California, and an assortment of European aristocrats.\textsuperscript{47} The U.S. secretary of the army asked Congress for special sanction to use military funds to defray expenses for army competitors at the Olympics and called it “highly desirable that the Army of the United States should be represented in these games.”\textsuperscript{48}

Local politicians eagerly hopped on the Olympic bandwagon. In New York City Mayor James Walker played to the Italian American vote, for example, by welcoming the Italian team (en route to Los Angeles via steamship and railroad) at City Hall, where the athletes tendered him the fascist salute.\textsuperscript{49} Mayor John Porter of Los Angeles and California’s Republican governor Rolph were ubiquitous fixtures at events, welcoming athletic delegations, attending social events, and watching the competitions.\textsuperscript{50}

At the national level, however, no leader took a cue from Mussolini, who gave the departing Italian team a rousing speech linking their performance to Italian national honor.\textsuperscript{51} President Herbert Hoover resolutely refused to recognize the Games as a political opportunity.\textsuperscript{52} Olympic precedent called for the head of state of the host country to open the Games, and political circles in the capital had anticipated that Hoover would return to his home state to attend the Games and then make his way north to Palo Alto to accept nomination as the Republican Party’s 1932 presidential candidate. Instead, just weeks before the Games began, Hoover cited “the pressure of national affairs” in rescinding

\textsuperscript{45} Los Angeles Times, 24 July 1932, VIa, 3.
\textsuperscript{46} Los Angeles Times, 26 July 1932, 1; ibid., 3 August 1932, 1.
\textsuperscript{47} Los Angeles Times, 3 August 1932, 10. The French consul threw a “swanky” military ball, with General La Font and his staff, officers from the U.S. Army, Navy, and Marine Corps, officers and other Allied forces, and other prominent guests. Los Angeles Times, 5 August 1932, 5.
\textsuperscript{48} Congressional Report No. 2443, 30 January 1931, in 811.4063 Olympic Games/143, Record Group 59, State Department Decimal Files, National Archives II, College Park, Maryland [hereafter SDDF].
\textsuperscript{49} New York Times, 13 July 1932, 21.
\textsuperscript{50} See coverage in the Los Angeles Times throughout the Games.
\textsuperscript{51} Los Angeles Times, 24 July 1932, VIa, 3.
\textsuperscript{52} His attitude toward the Games was summed up in a note he wrote to Secretary of State Henry Stimson, complaining that he was “being greatly plagued by the Olympic Games Committee” over the issuance of invitations. Hoover to Stimson, 13 December 1929, SDDF 811.4063 Olympic Games/2. According to an unsourced report, Hoover told friends, “It’s a crazy thing. And it takes some gall to expect me to be part of it.” Al J. Stump, “The Olympics That Almost Wasn’t,” American Heritage 33 (August/September 1932), 67.
an earlier promise to attend. He limited his patronage to an official statement calling the Olympics “a positive force for international acquaintance and understanding and good will.”

Hoping to secure the firm backing of his predecessor in the upcoming campaign, Hoover pressed former president Calvin Coolidge to open the Games in his stead, but Coolidge curtly refused, and in the end Hoover dispatched Vice President Charles Curtis. Franklin D. Roosevelt, then governor of New York and recently nominated as the Democratic presidential candidate, had greater appreciation for the public-relations value of the Olympics. He had opened the Winter Games in Lake Placid, New York, and planned to go to Los Angeles for the Summer Games, in what Republican leaders sneeringly called a ploy “to step into the limelight at Mr. Hoover’s expense.” In the end Roosevelt chose not to go, leaving Curtis a full share of the limelight, although the vice president studiously avoided stepping into it. He arrived by train the day before the opening, with no entourage except for one Secret Service officer, kept his public activities to a minimum, and left immediately after the opening ceremony.

The Department of State under Henry Stimson was equally oblivious of the political opportunities the Olympic represented. Although the department frequently assisted international cultural conferences, officials were tepid in their enthusiasm about the Los Angeles Games. At a time when many European foreign ministries regarded sport as an affair of state, American diplomats dithered over the perfunctory task of mailing invitations to the Games and initially refused to offer minor accommodations, such as waiving the usual visa requirements and import fees on sporting equipment.

Despite the U.S. government’s hands-off stance, other countries injected the Olympics with political significance, perhaps none more so than Japan. Intent on making a strong showing at the ’32 Games, Japan sent the largest foreign team, at nearly 130 athletes. The effort was part of a drive by the Japanese government to increase the country’s international standing through victories in international sports, a drive that included a campaign (eventually successful)

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53. The press also reported that Hoover “broke bread” with the athletes, partaking of a special loaf of bread from the Olympic Village that was flown in from Los Angeles and presented to the White House by Representative Harry Englebright of California. Los Angeles Times, 30 July 1932, 1; ibid., 30 July 1932, 1; New York Times, 30 July 1932, 1.
55. Los Angeles Times, 24 July 1932, II, 3; ibid., 31 July 1932, 5; ibid., 3 August 1932, 10.
56. Garland to Stimson, 20 January 1930, SDDF 811.4063 Olympic Games/10; Memorandum, 8 September 1931, SDDF 811.4063 Olympic Games/Lake Placid/44; Memorandum, 27 August 1931, 811.4063 Olympic Games/171. The invitations, like those to similar international cultural events, were transmitted by the State Department on behalf of the organizers. On European governments and sport, see Sport and International Politics: The Impact of Fascism and Communism on Sport, eds. Pierre Arnaud and James Riordan (London, 1998).
57. This figure is based on my tally of the roster of official registrants in Games of the Xth Olympiad, 793–814.
to secure the 1940 Olympics for Tokyo. Bolstered by an aggressive campaign to copy Western, and especially American, sport techniques (and by a two-week American etiquette course), the Japanese team shocked Western observers by winning six of seven gold medals in men’s swimming. Despite the U.S. government’s condemnation of Japan’s recent seizure of Manchuria, Ambassador Joseph Grew feted Japan’s Olympic team in Tokyo before its departure and praised the country’s progress in sports. The climate of hostility between the United States and Japan was not evident on the field. American public opinion was generally favorable toward the team, and (despite incidents of racial discrimination off the field) the Los Angeles papers began for once to use the term “Japanese” rather than the derogatory “Jap.”

58. As noted below, as the pressures of the war increased the Japanese government ultimately decided not to hold the Games. The Japanese government had begun subsidizing Olympic participation in 1924 and increased its subsidies for the 1932 Games by more than 65 percent. Eriko Yamamoto, “Cheers for Japanese Athletes: The 1932 Los Angeles Olympics and the Japanese American Community,” Pacific Historical Review 69 (August 2000), 404.


62. As was typical at the time, the American press described the performances of non-whites at the Olympics through racial lenses. See David B. Welky, “Viking Girls, Mermaids,
Despite the disinterest of the U.S. government, the Olympics were a success not just for Los Angeles but for the country as a whole. The influx of tourists and foreign businessmen provided Southern California with a welcome boost from the Depression doldrums, and the superb organization reflected well on the United States. The Games had set new standards of publicity, scale, and spectacle, and they had introduced important new elements to the Olympic repertoire, including the Olympic Village, where all male athletes lived together, and a new victory ceremony, with flags and anthems after each event. All of these innovations would be emulated by successors in the 1930s and beyond. German officials in charge of the 1936 Berlin Games attended the events in Los Angeles and took copious notes, and a good deal of what made the ’36 Games an even greater success was due to copying and improving on the lessons of 1932. In stamping the Games as commercialized entertainment available to the masses, in linking the Games to international trade and tourism, and in creating a high-profile event used for political purposes by countries like Italy and Japan, the Los Angeles extravaganza had an enduring influence on the world’s biggest sporting event and the global community.

The imprint of the United States on global sport before World War II was constructed not only through the Olympic Games but also through hundreds of smaller-scale sport exchanges involving coaches, trainers, managers, and athletes. Thousands of American athletes traveled abroad in the 1930s, playing on every continent and reaching millions of spectators directly and millions more through news accounts. America’s athletic ambassadors included professionals such as baseball great Babe Ruth, as well as hundreds of amateur (mostly collegiate) athletes. What had been a steady trickle of sport exchanges over previous decades became a torrent in the 1930s, as the number, size, and scope of sport tours involving Americans rose sharply. Such exchanges disseminated information and techniques, as well as ideas, attitudes, and perceptions that shaped foreign views of the United States and Americans’ attitudes about their place in the world.

In the years following the First World War sport was increasingly linked to conceptions of public health, military strength, and national power, and participation in international competitions was widely viewed as a necessary means of demonstrating membership in the international system and as a means of gaining prestige. As a result, governments in Europe, Latin America, and Asia took on larger roles in promoting sports and fitness programs at home and in funding teams for international competitions. In doing so they turned to the

United States as one model. Its recreational, physical education, and playground movements were influential beginning in the late nineteenth century. In professional individual sports, in amateur sports, and more broadly in approaches to training, the United States began to exert significant influence abroad early in the twentieth century. Although modern competitive sport is a British invention, by the interwar years it was increasingly identified with the United States. In sport, just as in other areas of culture and society, many observers in other countries saw the United States as the exemplar of modernity, technology, and progress, and if the Depression called into question the attractiveness of the American model in other areas, it did little to tarnish the country’s reputation in sport. Many foreigners admired American success and attributed it to rigorous and extensive training and careful attention to technical efficiency. Film analysis of technique, the use of wind tunnels to study motion, and laboratory studies of physiology and diet were among the ways Americans pioneered the “science” of sport.

The commercial success of professional sports was another aspect of the American sports scene other countries sometimes hoped to copy, as Babe Ruth’s 1934 tour of Japan illustrates. Sponsored by a Japanese newspaper, the Yomiuri

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65. The United States was not the only model. Sport systems with particular strengths (the British in soccer, the German in track and field) were also influential in other countries.


67. See, e.g., Frank Becker, Amerikanismus in Weimar: Sportsymbole und politische Kultur, 1918–1933 (Wiesbaden, 1993), 30–1. Soccer, of course, was a major exception: here Britain continued to be the dominant power and the global role model, even as the United States usurped the role of “sport nation” par excellence.

68. See, for example, Harald Lechenperg, Mann gegen Mann: Sport in U.S.A. mit europäischen Augen gesehen (Berlin, 1936), dustjacket, 8; “Why We Haven’t More Olympic Champions,” World Sports (London) (September 1936), 248.

69. See, for example, “Why America Wins at the Olympics,” Literary Digest, 27 August 1932, 8.

70. Other baseball exchanges in the Thirties include a visit of major-leaguers in 1931, visits by American college teams in 1934 and 1935, and the visit of a Japanese team to the United States in 1935. A dearth of accessible sources on the American side has left this fascinating subject understudied. For what is available, see Richard C. Crepeau, “Pearl Harbor: A Failure
Shimbun, a team of American League stars led by Ruth competed against college and industry teams, drawing over half a million spectators in eighteen games across the country.\textsuperscript{71} Despite rising tensions between the United States and Japan, the visit was a great success. Ruth, who was a household name in Japan, was greeted as a hero; Ambassador Grew acclaimed the famed hitter as worth a hundred ambassadors. One historian notes that Ruth's image was “everywhere: on the cover of the program sold at ballparks; in newspaper headlines... and in milk chocolate advertisements.”\textsuperscript{72} Describing the welcome the Americans received in Tokyo, where a hundred thousand Japanese waved flags and threw confetti, the \textit{New York Times} remarked that “the Babe's big bulk today blotted out such unimportant things as international squabbles over oil and navies.”\textsuperscript{73} When not playing baseball the Americans were shuttled to luncheons, garden parties, and dinner dances, often attended by leading Japanese businessmen, officials, and royalty. The visit led directly to the establishment of Japan's first professional baseball league—and to the attempted assassination of the tour's main backer, \textit{Yomiuri} head Matsutoro Shoriki, by nationalist extremists angry about the tour.\textsuperscript{74}

More influential than such infrequent professional tours were the numerous exchanges that took place at the amateur level. Foreign athletes competed in growing numbers in the United States, and foreign coaches and athletic officials toured the country, inspecting facilities and studying coaching techniques. Like their counterparts in business and engineering, American coaches were hired to train foreign teams. Princeton University's coach, for example, worked with Poland's national swim team for six months in 1937, introducing “real discipline,” “modern technique,” and “sound training methods.”\textsuperscript{75} Other coaches and former athletes were hired by Austria, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary,
Figure 4: Informal cultural exchange: Japanese Olympians sampling the fare at a Los Angeles drive-in in 1932. (AAF)
Italy, New Zealand, the Philippines, and several Latin American countries, to offer only a partial list.  

The most extensive channel of cultural exchange occurred as American amateur athletes traveled abroad. American track and field athletes toured Europe nearly every summer, and boxers, wrestlers, weightlifters, swimmers, bobsledders, and ice hockey, water polo, basketball, and baseball teams traveled to Europe, Asia, and South America. Most of these athletes competed under the auspices of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU). Although many other

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76. Brundage, “The Greatest Sport Nation in the World,” 1942 speech, Box 244, Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois at Urbana [hereafter “ABC”]. On foreign coaches training in the United States, see, for example, the notice about basketball in *Amateur Athlete*, October 1939, 11.

77. This summary is compiled primarily from articles in *Amateur Athlete* during the 1930s.

78. The other major American organization involved in international amateur sport was the American Olympic Committee (AOC). The two groups often clashed over issues of power and control. On the AOC, see Robert E. Lehr, “The American Olympic Committee, 1896–1940: From Chaos to Order,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1985. On the AAU see Robert Korsgaard, “A History of the Amateur Athletic Union of the United States” (unpublished typescript, 1952) and Arnold William Flath, *A History of Relations between the National Collegiate Athletic Association and the Amateur Athletic Union of the United States (1905–1963)* (Champaign, 1964). In 1938, the AAU was the U.S. member of the international federations for swimming, track and field, boxing, wrestling, gymnastics, weightlifting, bobsleigh, field handball, ice hockey, and basketball. AAU track rules, 1938, Box 9, ABC.
countries set up ministries for sport and provided government subsidies for international competitions, the U.S. government abstained from funding or promoting international sports events, in keeping with its view of cultural relations as an arena appropriate only for private intervention.\textsuperscript{79} Thus, as in other areas of culture, the initiative in promoting international exchange was left to private bodies like the AAU. Led by men like Avery Brundage and Gustavus Kirby, successful businessmen who pursued leadership positions in amateur sport as a hobby, the AAU oversaw amateur sport at both the national and international level.\textsuperscript{80} As the number of such tours rose, the AAU began to take a share of the profits (while strenuously keeping the athletes themselves from taking a share of the pie).\textsuperscript{81}

Bidding farewell in 1934 to a record-breaking number of athletes heading abroad for summer travel, the AAU’s \textit{Amateur Athlete} declared that “for once the sun will not set on an AAU athlete.”\textsuperscript{82} Three separate track and field teams set off for Europe, a women’s basketball team set sail for the world champi-

\textsuperscript{79} On the State Department’s view of cultural relations in general, see Frank A. Ninkovich, \textit{The Diplomacy of Ideas: U.S. Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations, 1938–1950} (Cambridge, 1981).

\textsuperscript{80} Brundage held the presidency of the Amateur Athletic Union from 1928 to 1934 and headed the American Olympic Committee throughout the 1930s. He was a member of the International Olympic Committee’s Executive Committee from 1936 on and held positions in several international sport federations, including a vice presidency in the track and field federation (the IAAF) from 1930 to 1952. Brundage’s extensive personal papers are held in ABC; Allen Guttmann has written a biography: \textit{The Games Must Go On: Avery Brundage and the Olympic Movement} (New York, 1984). Kirby was a longtime member of the AAU and served as treasurer of the AOC throughout the 1930s. Kirby’s papers are held at the USOC Archives. Both men were indefatigable publicists for sport, giving hundreds of lectures, radio addresses, and interviews, publishing hundreds of articles, attending dozens of national and international conferences, and helping to organize countless athletic events. Brundage in particular had many friends and acquaintances in sporting circles abroad, served in many international sport organizations, and carried on an extensive international correspondence. Both Brundage and Kirby traveled widely, making frequent trips to Europe to attend sport events and meetings and, less frequently, visiting Asia and Latin America on sport-related business. Through their myriad activities, they helped spread a highly idealized view of the virtues of “clean and honest” amateur sport, both here and abroad.

\textsuperscript{81} Typically the AAU did not itself organize international tours, but as the organization in charge of certifying amateur status its approval was required before such tours could take place. Under the rules of most international federations, every international match required the formal permission of the national body governing that sport in each participating country. As the governing body for most sports, the AAU’s permission was therefore required even for tours organized by other groups. Financing for tours was typically derived from ticket sales. A host organization usually offered a “guarantee” to the visiting teams, under which the host agreed to pay a certain amount of money for traveling expenses and daily stipends. When expenses and stipends came to less than the guarantee, the visiting team received the difference. In 1937 the AAU began to levy a “foreign relations” tax on international competitions, amounting to 5 percent of the gross receipts. Under this new policy, the Swedish, German, and British track associations remitted thousands of dollars to the AAU in 1938. \textit{Amateur Athletic Union of the United States, Minutes of the Fiftieth Annual Meeting, 1938} (n.p., n.d.), 18, 22.

\textsuperscript{82} “On Foreign Soil,” \textit{Amateur Athlete} 5 (August 1934), 8.
onship in London, a group of Polish Americans went to the Polish Olympics at Warsaw, and Japan welcomed an American track team, a group of swimmers, and a Harvard baseball team, as well as Babe Ruth and his major-league colleagues. The scene was repeated in subsequent years, as the AAU dispersed its athletic emissaries in growing numbers to almost every continent on the globe. In 1938 swimmers, basketball players (men and women), boxers, wrestlers, bobsledders, and water polo players competed in Europe, South America, Japan, Mexico, Bermuda, and Canada. Six weightlifters competed in the world championship in Vienna. An ice hockey team competed in the world championship in Prague and then toured France, Switzerland, England, and Germany. Forty track and field athletes, divided into three divisions, competed in ten European countries, drawing crowds of up to one hundred thousand at the principal events.

Athletes traveling abroad, like other cultural emissaries such as film stars, were treated as emissaries of the American way of life both by foreign government officials and U.S. diplomats. On AAU-sponsored tours, athletes were exhorted to present themselves as American representatives, purveyors of the American way of life. Team managers peppered their charges with speeches on good sportsmanship and fair play, on graciousness in victory and in defeat, and on courteous behavior off the field. Athletes were selected for tours based not only on their sporting performances but also on the basis of officials’ judgments about their tact, courtesy, and ability to get along with each other. Sometimes, but not always, such efforts meant that top African American athletes were excluded for fear that white teammates would object to traveling with them. Most participants were men, though some female basketball teams and track and field athletes toured Europe, South America, and Japan. Bound by the stringent requirements imposed on amateurs, most of the athletes were college students of independent means.

86. See, for example, “Report on American Track and Field Team in Oslo,” Hoffman Philip, Oslo Legation, 10 September 1934, Box 1, ABC, which attributed the tour’s success to “the careful selection of the team members” and “preparatory care” in ensuring that the athletes and managers behaved with tact and courtesy.
87. In arranging for an American track and field team to tour Sweden in 1931, for example, Sweden’s national athletic organization requested the inclusion of Eddie Tolan, an African American track star then at the University of Michigan. The American organizer demurred, advising that including a black athlete would cause “difficulties.” Kjellstrom to Bingham, 17 June 1931, Box 40, Bingham records, HAA.
88. Participants typically had their travel costs paid and were given a small stipend for daily expenses, but were forbidden from receiving any compensation for “broken time,” or salary lost during competition.
Competitions featuring American athletes, even at the amateur level, drew tens of thousands of spectators, and in any one tour a million foreigners might view these representatives of the American way of life. Contacts with foreign cultures extended far beyond the playing field to myriad cultural activities such as receptions, luncheons, dinners, theater parties, sightseeing trips, and meetings with foreign athletes and prominent state officials. When a contingent of American swimmers visited Japan in 1935, for example, the Japanese prime minister and the minister of foreign affairs threw receptions for the team. Even U.S. diplomats, despite the State Department’s hands-off approach to sport exchanges, treated visiting American athletes as unofficial representatives of the nation. The scene at the 1932 Davis Cup match in Paris, where the president of France and the U.S. ambassador together watched the Franco-American matchup, was increasingly typical and highlighted the burgeoning popularity and political significance of major sports events.

With the significant exception of the movement to boycott the 1936 Berlin Olympics (discussed below), neither economic problems nor political tensions had much effect on American advocacy of sport contacts. In 1937, under the leadership of Jeremiah Mahoney, an outspoken critic of Nazi Germany, the AAU prohibited American participation in a tour of Germany, in what the press labeled “the first rebuff to a foreign nation in the half century of [the AAU’s] existence.” With a new president in charge the next year, however, tours resumed, despite the March 1938 Anschluss. After 1937 public outcry against Japanese atrocities in China spurred a campaign to move the 1940 Games from Tokyo, and several prominent athletic officials resigned positions over the issue. Yet the bulk of the American sport establishment showed little inclination to let politics “intrude” on sport. U.S.-Japanese sport contacts dropped off sharply after 1937, and in 1938 the Japanese government withdrew as host for the 1940 Olympics, but both developments were due more to Japanese preoccupation with the war in China than to American pressure.

What were the forces driving the remarkable expansion of American participation in international sports, even in a time of economic trauma? In part, the Americans were simply pulled in by a global trend that saw the rapid expansion

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89. See, for example, Amateur Athlete (October 1938), 13.
90. Amateur Athlete (October 1935), 7.
92. Mahoney explained the ban in these terms: “I do not believe that our American athletes should go to a country where freedom of speech, religion and action have been abolished. . . . Nazi ideology cannot conform with American democracy.” New York Times 3 July 1937, 1. On the 1938 meets see the New York Times, 5 August 1938–22 August 1938.
94. New York Times, 17 October 1937, 38; ibid., 15 July 1938, 16; AAU, Minutes of the Fiftieth Annual Meeting, 1938, 103. The 1940 Games are another worthy topic that has not received due attention.
of modern sport and increasing international competitions of all kinds in sports, from the World Cup in soccer (initiated in 1930) to large regional events like the Far Eastern Athletic Association’s Games to small-scale collegiate meets. But Americans were also strong advocates of such contacts, for a variety of reasons. The U.S. military was a major proponent of sport as a form of military training and of international contests to promote sport. General Douglas MacArthur, for example, had served as president of the American Olympic Committee in 1928 and accompanied the American team to the Amsterdam Olympic Games that year. The military sent competitors to the Olympic Games and frequently used polo meets and informal competitions to reinforce military ties with other nations.

Economics, of course, also played a role. The brief frenzy provoked by a 1931 report that Italy was adopting baseball as the national sport provides one indication of how sporting goods manufacturers hoped that the spread of American sports and sports techniques would increase demand for their products. The report was false, but the successes of America’s athletic champions did spur demand for American goods, as the National Geographic Society reported in 1928: “American movies, automobiles, dental schools, typewriters, phonographs, and even its prize fights lead in spreading American fashions and customs throughout the world. . . . Millions won by [boxers Jack] Dempsey and [Gene] Tunney prompt young men, white, yellow, brown, black, or red, with two good fists to try them out, and incidentally equip themselves with the necessary ’gym’ shoes and boxing gloves from the ‘land of champions.’” Other businesses also saw profit potential in sport exchanges. U.S. businessmen with


96. On military participation at the Olympics, see above. For one notable example of a polo meet, see the description of a visit to Argentina by a U.S. Army polo team, whose members were received by the minister of war and the president. Report of Robert Woods Bliss, Buenos Aires, 27 November 1930, SDDF 835.40634/4. On a similar polo meet between a U.S. Army team and a Mexican Army team, see Patrick Hurley, Secretary of War, to Stimson, 22 March 1930, 22 March 1930, SDDF 811.40634/1. At one such event Eleanor Roosevelt acted as patroness. Secretary to Mrs. Roosevelt to Sumner Welles, 5 September 1934, SDFF, 811.40634/44. On informal matches during U.S. naval visits to foreign ports see Laurence Duggan to General Strong, 12 June 1939, SDDF 816.40634/11.


98. Ludwell Denny, America Conquers Britain (New York, 1930), 405–6, quoting from the Bulletin of the National Geographic Society of the United States, 16 February 1928. The report also suggests the ways that American cultural influence had interlocking effects: the prominence of prizefights in Hollywood films, for example, helped popularize boxing in Europe, and the cachet of American sports stars spurred demand for American products in general. On connections between trade and film and on the role of Hollywood films in stimulating the boxing fad in Europe, see Costigliola, Awkward Dominion, 168, 176.
commercial interests in Latin America were major backers of various schemes for Pan-American Games hatched in the second half of the 1930s, and newspaper publishers here and abroad were among the most eager internationalizers in sport, as was the case for the Los Angeles Olympics and Babe Ruth’s tour of Japan.

The U.S. Department of Commerce did not hesitate to assist American sporting goods manufacturers in the same way it helped other American companies, but for the most part the rest of the U.S. government took little interest in international sports. Politicians and officials were often sports fans themselves: witness, for example, the star-studded attendance at the now-legendary boxing match between African American Joe Louis and German Max Schmeling in 1938, an event the press billed as a battle between democracy and dictatorship. The seventy thousand fans who packed Yankee Stadium included the governors of four states, New York’s mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, members of Congress, President Roosevelt’s son, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, and the German ambassador to the United States. Politicians also saw sports events as part of their cultural-patronage duties. President Hoover, for example, threw out the first pitch at baseball games and officiated at tennis’s Davis Cup draw. Hoping to secure the “Negro vote,” both presidential nominees in the 1936 election sought the endorsement of Jesse Owens, the African American sprinter whose dazzling performances at the 1936 Olympics had made him a national hero.

On the whole, however, the nation’s leading politicians preferred to steer clear of international sports. The disinterest of Hoover and Stimson in the Olympic Games has already been noted; in circumstances fraught with far greater potential for controversy, FDR and Hull followed much the same path. Throughout the thirties, athletic organizations kept the State Department informed of their activities abroad, while the department responded with mild approbation and a firmly hands-off attitude. It staunchly resisted taking a

99. Memorandum of Meeting, 27 June 1939, SDDF 812.4063/3. For additional material see also Box 30, ABC.

100. In 1930, for example, the Department of Commerce asked its foreign services to compile information on sports in foreign countries, in response to inquiries from American manufacturers of athletic and sporting goods. Memorandum, 12 April 1930, SDDF 811.4063 Olympic Games/44.


103. New York Times, 3 September 1936, 10; ibid., 10 September 1936, 2; ibid., 27 September 1936, 5. Owens threw his support to Landon.

104. Typical was Hull’s 1939 response to one proposal for a Pan-American Games. He wrote: “I... believe that there is a definite place for friendly athletic competition in our relations with the other countries of this hemisphere. The organization of such events must, of course, be left to private initiative.” Cordell Hull, 2 October 1939, quoted in “Supplementary Report of Avery Brundage of the First Pan American Sport Congress,” 18 November 1940, Box 244, ABC.
position on matters where sports and politics clearly intersected, refusing to take a stand on the venues selected for the Olympic Games, whether in regard to the Nazis’ staging of the 1936 Games, Japan’s campaign to host the 1940 Games, or Detroit’s bid to host the 1944 Games, although its officers stationed abroad compiled reports on the political uses of the Olympics by Germany and Japan.\textsuperscript{105} Some diplomats in the field praised the effects of sports tours and called for more, but others argued that international contests more often provoked ill-will.\textsuperscript{106} The attitude at the highest levels was probably best expressed by Under-Secretary of State Sumner Welles, who wrote in an internal note that the department would “stultify itself” by lending official support to a tour.\textsuperscript{107} Only at the very end of the 1930s, in connection with its formal entry into the business of cultural diplomacy, did the department begin tentatively and on a very small scale to take a direct role in promoting sport exchanges with Latin America. The Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, created in 1940 to further friendly relations with Latin America, formed a (tiny) sports section, which tried to encourage “interchange of athletes, teams, coaches, and demonstration groups” between the United States and Latin American countries.\textsuperscript{108}

Even the U.S. government, however, could not avoid becoming at least partially embroiled in the decade’s biggest sports controversy: the question of participation in the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games.\textsuperscript{109} The Olympics had been

\textsuperscript{105} On Japan as venue, see the note by the Division of Far Eastern Affairs, 28 March 1935, in SDDF 862.4063 Olympic Games/22. On Detroit, see Lyon to Cherrington, 27 October 1939, SDDF 810.4063/11. For reports on the 1936 Games see the notes below. On the 1940 Games see the report by Joseph Grew, 6 August 1936, SDDF 894.4063 Olympic Games/4.

\textsuperscript{106} For one favorable view, see a report noting that every country visited by an American track team had shown “enthusiastic admiration” for the athletes, whose accomplishments “had made a valuable contribution to international accord and friendship.” “American Track and Field Team in Oslo,” Report of U.S. Legation, 10 September 1934 (857.4064/3), Box 1, ABC. For a negative assessment see the reference to George Messersmith’s opinion in Lyon to Cherrington, 27 October 1939, SDDF 810.4063/11.

\textsuperscript{107} Welles was referring to a chess tour. He recommended against the department’s contacting steamship lines to secure reduced rates for the team. Welles to Cherrington, 24 July 1939, SDDF 835.40621/2.

\textsuperscript{108} Address by Asa Bushnell, director of the office’s sport section, to the NCAA, in Proceedings of the National Convention of the National Collegiate Athletic Association, 1941: 86–90; Bushnell to Kirby, 4 August 1941, Box 30, ABC.

granted to Berlin in 1931, and although the Nazis had derided the Olympics as “Jewish international enterprises” before seizing power in 1933, Hitler quickly recognized the propaganda value of the event and set about staging the Games in a grand manner. As the repressive nature of his regime became more and more apparent, many Americans grew uncomfortable with the idea of lending implicit sanction to fascism by participating in the Games. The Nazis were excluding Jews from participating on the national Olympic team, a clear violation of Olympic principles; moreover, the staging of a peaceful festival in the capital of a regime based on race-hatred reeked of hypocrisy to many Americans. As a movement to boycott the Games gained momentum in 1934 and 1935, a wide-ranging and often vitriolic public debate engulfed the country.

Within the world of sport, a group led by the AAU president, former New York State Supreme Court judge and leading Democrat Jeremiah Mahoney, campaigned strongly in favor of a boycott on the basis that Germany’s discrimination against Jews and other religious groups violated Olympic principles. “Under its present leadership,” Mahoney wrote in a public letter to the German Olympic Committee, “your country not only is not observing but cannot observe the principles of democracy and of equality upon which the Olympic Games are based. The Olympic code, which recognizes in the realm of sports the absolute equality of all races and of all faiths, is the direct antithesis of Nazi ideology, which has as its cornerstone the dogma of racial inequality.” Brundage, then head of the American Olympic Committee (AOC), forcefully advocated participation. Privately branding his opponents Jews and communists, Brundage countered that the Olympics should not be derailed by what he dismissed as “the present Jew-Nazi altercation.”

The debate reached far beyond the world of sport. Businessmen, intellectuals, and Catholic, Jewish, and other religious groups joined the fray. An avalanche of pamphlets, radio interviews, rallies, demonstrations, congressional resolutions, letter-writing campaigns, petitions, and newspaper editorials were used by each side to present its case and to castigate opponents. The Nation and the New Republic joined the boycott forces; the New York Times alone ran hundreds of stories on the issue; and the question was the subject of one of the

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111. “Germany Has Violated the Olympic Code! An Open Letter to Dr. Theodor Lewald by Jeremiah T. Mahoney,” 21 October 1935, pamphlet issued by The Committee on Fair Play in Sports, Box 7, Kirby papers, USOC Archives. The letter was also published in various newspapers.

112. Guttmann, “‘Nazi Olympics,’” 38-8; American Olympic Committee, Fair Play for American Athletes (New York, [1936]). One historian has suggested that, in addition to ideological inclination, Brundage’s commercial interests may have played a role in his support of Berlin: New York Times, 21 February 1999, Sports, 1.
earliest Gallup polls, which showed 43 percent of Americans in favor of a boycott.\footnote{113}

Political leaders also weighed in on the issue. At least eight state governors and an equal number of U.S. senators and representatives publicly expressed reservations about participation or advocated a boycott.\footnote{114} New York representative Emanuel Celler introduced a congressional resolution denouncing Nazi religious and racial discrimination and discouraging participation.\footnote{115} Two senators urged the State Department to give “serious consideration” to the question of withdrawing from the Games.\footnote{116} George Messersmith, first as the U.S. consul general in Berlin and after 1934 as minister in Vienna, waged a vigorous one-man campaign to push the State Department into action. At his own initiative, he sent more than half a dozen reports on the Olympics to various superiors, detailing Nazi discrimination against Jews in both sports and broader social life.\footnote{117} Asserting that the Berlin Olympics “will play an important part in determining political developments in Europe,” he argued that the United States “should refrain from participation” because involvement would further Nazi “aims for political expansion and prestige.”\footnote{118} His aim was to convince the department to communicate confidentially with the AAU and its member groups, which would, he felt, surely come to their senses if the true situation in Germany were known to them.\footnote{119}

The department, however, took no action. Both Hull and Roosevelt refused to take a position, as they did with regard to Nazi persecution of the Jews in general.\footnote{120} Keeping well clear of the matter, the White House refrained from offering a farewell message both to the American Olympic team and to another American group going to Barcelona for an anti-Nazi counter-Olympics.\footnote{121} When Hull and FDR were forced to defend earlier acceptance of honorary positions on the AOC after that body sent out fund-raising letters with their names

\footnote{114}{See the list in Wenn, “Suitable Policy,” 333, fn32.}
\footnote{116}{\textit{New York Times}, 14 August 1935, 4.}
\footnote{117}{For details see Wenn, “A Tale of Two Diplomats,” which is based on Messersmith’s personal papers at the University of Delaware.}
\footnote{118}{Report of George S. Messersmith, “With reference to American participation in the Olympic Games to be held in Berlin in 1936,” 15 November 1935, SDDF 862.4063 Olympic Games/57, 11–12, 10, 11.}
\footnote{119}{See, e.g., Messersmith’s report of 28 November 1933, SDDF 862.4063 Olympic Games/1.}
\footnote{120}{In a note to Senator Lonergan, for example, Hull used typical language to describe the boycott issue as a private matter, about which any government statement would be inappropriate. Hull to Lonergan, 12 December 1935, SDDF 862.4063 Olympic Games/59. See also Wenn, “Suitable Policy,” 320.}
\footnote{121}{Wenn, “Suitable Policy,” 327; Krüger, “U.S.A.”}
in the letterhead, Hull explained that such patronage carried “no international political implication.”

The final decision on participation rested solely with the AAU, and by sheer force of will and clever manipulation of voting procedures, Brundage ensured that the AAU convention in December 1935 voted, by a razor-thin margin, in favor of sending a team. By the time the Olympics were held the controversy had receded, and American press reports of the Games struck a mostly celebratory tone, lauding the Nazis for their organizational achievements. The American ambassador, William Dodd, reported that “from the German point of view the Games were an almost unqualified success” and that American visitors had been favorably impressed with conditions in Germany. The American presence in Berlin has often been retrospectively, and justifiably, condemned as a violation of principle that allowed the Nazi regime to score a major propaganda coup. Yet by threatening to boycott the Games—and, given U.S. dominance at the Olympics, such a boycott would have seriously diminished the stature of the Games—Americans were able to cajole the Nazi regime into small but significant concessions. American pressure was largely responsible for the inclusion of two athletes of mixed ancestry on the German team. American attitudes were a factor in forcing the Nazi regime to remove anti-Jewish placards near Olympic venues and to tone down anti-Semitic rhetoric during the Games. Above all, American participation in the Games meant that a black athlete, Jesse Owens, became the hero of the Games and the darling of the Berlin crowds, vividly discrediting Nazi racial theory in Hitler’s own capital.

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122. According to long-standing tradition, the president of the United States held the honorary presidency of the American Olympic Committee, and the secretaries of state, war, and the navy were honorary vice presidents. Such patronage was common, Hull explained, for organizations promoting religion, peace, or international sports. State Department press release, 23 April 1936, SDDF 811.43 American Olympic Association/4. See also Wenn, “Suitable Policy,” 325–6.

123. Arnd Krüger, “U.S.A.”


126. The hockey player Rudi Ball and fencer Helene Mayer both had part-Jewish roots, although Mayer did not consider herself Jewish. (On the victory stand, after winning a silver medal, she raised her arm in the Nazi salute.) Other Jewish athletes were barred from the team. Mandell, Nazi Olympics, 76–7.


128. On the temporary suspension of Nazi racism and anti-Semitism during the Games, see Christiane Eisenberg, “Englisch Sports” und deutsche Bürger. Eine Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1800–1939 (Paderborn, 1999), 411–9; Gassert, Amerika im Dritten Reich, 192–3. Gassert calls the favorable Nazi press coverage of Owens’s achievements “astonishing.” Some observers have seen anti-Semitism behind the American coach’s still-murky decision to drop two Jewish sprinters from the ’36 relay team and replace them with Owens and Ralph Metcalfe (both faster runners), a move that has since been the subject of much rumor and speculation. See Krüger, “U.S.A.”
The debate over the “Nazi Olympics” highlights the extremely tight linkage between sport and ideology in American life. Since the late nineteenth century, sport had become integral to conceptions of national identity in the United States, as in many other countries. In the interwar years, as Warren Susman has observed, Americans became preoccupied with defining America as a culture and with illuminating the characteristics of an “American way of life,” a term that became increasingly common in the 1930s. Sport was unquestionably a significant component of what Americans saw as essential to their way of life, embodying for many Americans the qualities that made the United States a great nation: democracy, fairness, and honesty foremost among them. Popularized in books like *Democracy and Sport* and in countless articles and speeches, the notion that sport was inherently democratic and intrinsically suited to the American character became a staple of public discourse.

Like other emblems of the American way of life, sport became part of a moral crusade to spread “Americanism” throughout the world. American sport enthusiasts believed that by disseminating their vision of sport and sportsmanship, they could implant a moral code that would bring other nations toward democracy and peace. International sport contests were encouraged not for their entertainment value, but above all for their educational value; not as a distraction from the ills of the world, but as a remedy for them. Sport officials deeply believed that participation in sport could solve serious problems like unemployment at home and conflict abroad.

The idea that international competition in sport acts as a force for peace has a long pedigree, and the creation of the modern Olympic Games at the end of the nineteenth century was deeply influenced by contemporaneous currents of peaceful internationalism. By the 1930s the idea that sport contests promote mutual understanding was accepted as a truism by much of the American public. A typical variant was expressed in the widely read *Literary Digest* in 1934. Noting that international contests often engender disputes, and ridiculing the claim that


\[\text{131.}\ \text{John R. Tunis, *Democracy and Sport* (New York, 1941).}

\[\text{132.}\ \text{I base this observation for the most part on extensive reading in the private correspondence of Avery Brundage (in ABC) and Gustavus Kirby (in USOC Archives).}

international sport could prevent war, its article nonetheless concluded that “as a means of dispelling provincial ignorance, of multiplying and spreading the various forms of sport and even of promoting the mutual respect of the different peoples for one another’s prowess and virtues,” international contests like the Olympic Games did far more good than harm.\(^\text{134}\) In another common formulation, sport was described as “the language of the world . . . [and] the universal meeting ground of common understanding.”\(^\text{135}\) Citing these qualities, advocates often claimed that sporting exchanges were superior to other forms of diplomacy. Not only did sport tours give foreigners “[lasting] insight into the characteristics of the American people,” as one sport official wrote, “they create an atmosphere of friendship that cements the Nations into one large family.” This official conceded that “diplomatic relations, tourist travel, and commerce are a great help,” but asserted—with more than the usual dose of hyperbole—that “the greatest good is derived from having our athletes compete on foreign soil.”\(^\text{136}\)

Business and political leaders also saw value in promoting sport’s “civilizing mission.” In 1923 a group of New York men founded the Sportsmanship Brotherhood to foster and spread sportsmanship throughout the world. Matthew Woll of the American Federation of Labor served as president, and its board of directors included Franklin Roosevelt (out of whose Broadway offices the group initially worked) and Owen Young, the chairman of General Electric.\(^\text{137}\) Over the 1920s and ’30s the group gradually expanded its activities, setting up college chapters and establishing ties with England, Hungary, and Japan.\(^\text{138}\) The organization’s leaders hoped to create “a better world” by encouraging nations to enter friendly sporting contests where sportsmanship would prevail. Sport, the group believed, offered the most potent means to train minds and characters in the spirit of democracy: it was “a medium for reaching the hearts and minds of hundreds of millions of the human race.” Once introduced on the playing fields, the spirit of sportsmanship would infiltrate other areas of life and become the governing principle in political and international relationships. The process was virtually guaranteed to be effective, Brotherhood members believed, because

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134. “At the Observation Post,” *Literary Digest*, 6 October 1934, 11. As Peter Beck has observed, the British were more prone to condemn international contests for arousing more ill-will than mutual understanding. Winston Churchill, for example, commented in regard to the 1936 Olympics that “sport, when it enters the international field in Olympic games and other contests between countries, may breed ill-will rather than draw the nations closer together.” Peter Beck, *Scoring for Britain: International Football and International Politics, 1900–1939* (London, 1999), 38.


sportsmanship was an automatic product of playing according to the rules, and its principles were readily and unconsciously absorbed.\textsuperscript{139}

The deeply held belief that sport, American-style, could transform other ideologies and social systems does much to explain U.S. participation in the 1936 Olympics, as well as the fervor with which many Americans pursued sports ties in general in the 1930s. Americans saw no contradiction in asserting sport's uniquely American qualities while at the same time offering it as a panacea to other peoples. As Morrell Heald and Lawrence Kaplan have noted of American cultural diplomacy in general, “what was considered most American was also considered universal.”\textsuperscript{140} Like other elements of popular culture that sometimes conveyed materialistic, shallow, or otherwise unflattering images of Americanism, sport was not an unproblematic medium: as skeptics pointed out, American supremacy had a downside in that it could leave other countries frustrated by their inability to win. For enthusiasts, however, sport was one of the most potent vehicles in the American mission to transform the world, a remedy for much of the world’s ills. Whereas nations pursuing modernization and Westernization could adopt the material trappings of the West without adopting its spiritual values, sport, in their view, would effortlessly and inevitably inculcate habits of mind and internalize democratic practices.

In 1935 the publicity director of the AAU argued that the growth of sport entailed the spread of American ideology. Noting that American athletes “have always triumphed” over rivals from “aristocratic, monarchical and despotic nations,” Clarence Bush found the explanation for American success in “our competitive system of life,” which was being imitated by the rest of the world. Bush was sanguine about the fact that imperialist and nationalist nations like Japan were exploiting sport for militarization. Such nations, he claimed, were “playing with forces whose effect they do not appreciate, forces which will eventually change their national concepts. What are these forces? We call them the forces of Americanism.” Foreign athletes were copying American techniques, but in the process were also “absorbing unwittingly our ideology, which is indispensable in exercising our technique and making it effective in breaking records and winning championships.” As a result of using American techniques, other nations might soon challenge America’s athletic supremacy, but because they were attaining success by adopting American ideology, Bush argued, “Americanism will still be triumphant.”\textsuperscript{141}

Bush was partly right: “American ideology” did influence international sport. Foreigners did not accept or admire all facets of American sport practice; the

\textsuperscript{139} Hamilton, \textit{Sportsmanship}, 8–9, 12–3, 23–4, 33, 41.
\textsuperscript{140} Morrell Heald and Lawrence S. Kaplan, \textit{Culture and Diplomacy: The American Experience} (Westport, CT, 1977), 4.
\textsuperscript{141} Clarence Bush, “Americanism in the Olympic Games,” [c. 1935], Box 232, ABC.
semiprofessionalism of college sport and high levels of commercialism were among the ills frequently criticized by Europeans.\textsuperscript{142} Georges Duhamel’s influential critique of American society included a caustic portrait of the brutality of American football and the mindlessness of mass spectatorship. Yet Duhamel acknowledged that the brand of modern sport practiced in the United States was gaining popularity abroad.\textsuperscript{143} American sports tours helped spread American-style sport, but their more important consequence was to act as cultural diffusers in general terms, helping to create a genuinely international sporting community in which the best athletes measured themselves against all of humanity, not against local or national peers. Participation in this global society integrated part of the American sport community into a larger world order and inculcated an internationalist perspective among a significant segment of the American population, despite prevailing isolationist sentiment.\textsuperscript{144}

American participation in international sports also had cultural and economic effects beyond the world of sport, helping to promote tourism, trade, and the spread of American culture more generally. By garbing their participation in international sport in heavy layers of moralizing rhetoric, America’s self-designated sport ambassadors influenced the way Americans perceived their country’s role in the world, reaffirming deeply rooted convictions that the United States was a model for the rest of the world and a force for peace in international affairs. In an ironic twist of fate, however, American leadership was perhaps most decisive in propelling the commercialization and commodification of sport in the international sphere. The linkages cemented in Los Angeles in 1932—between sport and entertainment and between sport and consumption—played a major role in fueling modern sport’s meteoric rise to global popularity. With one hand American officials clung tenaciously to an archaic amateur ideal; with the other, they ushered in changes (such as rigorous training, an achievement-oriented ethos, and the celebration of individual heroes) that inevitably drove competitive sport into professionalized and commercialized channels. In the end, the spread of American sport practices throughout the world did not, as many proponents believed it would, lead to peace and democracy; it led instead to Coke, commercials, and the cult of consumption.

\textsuperscript{142} Complaints about semiprofessionalism in college sport were frequently aired in European newspapers like the major French sports paper, \textit{L’Auto}. Criticisms of commercialization and the quest for “sensations” were common even in mostly favorable works, such as Lechenperg, \textit{Mann gegen Mann}.


\textsuperscript{144} For more on this development see Keys, “Dictatorship of Sport,” 113–7.