



The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America

By Elliott J. Gorn

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"It didn't occur to me until fairly late in the work that I was writing a book about the beginnings of a national celebrity culture. By 1860, a few boxers had become heroes to working-class men, and big fights drew considerable newspaper coverage, most of it quite negative since the whole enterprise was illegal. But a generation later, toward the end of the century, the great John L. Sullivan of Boston had become the nation's first true sports celebrity, an American icon. The likes of poet Vachel Lindsay and novelist Theodore Dreiser lionized him?Dreiser called him 'a sort of prize fighting J. P. Morgan'?and Ernest Thompson Seton, founder of the Boy Scouts, noted approvingly that he never met a lad who would not rather be Sullivan than Leo Tolstoy."?from the Afterword to the Updated Edition

Elliott J. Gorn's *The Manly Art* tells the story of boxing's origins and the sport's place in American culture. When first published in 1986, the book helped shape the ways historians write about American sport and culture, expanding scholarly boundaries by exploring masculinity as an historical subject and by suggesting that social categories like gender, class, and ethnicity can be understood only in relation to each other.

This updated edition of Gorn's highly influential history of the early prize rings features a new afterword, the author's meditation on the ways in which studies of sport, gender, and popular culture have changed in the quarter century since the book was first published. An up-to-date bibliography ensures that *The Manly Art* will remain a vital resource for a new generation.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Gorn has done a splendid job of colorfully sketching the development of nineteenth-century prize fighting; the book is beautifully written, extensively researched, and rooted in a sophisticated understanding of American social and cultural history. He demonstrates that a single work can combine engaging narrative and incisive analysis. . . . A delightful and path-breaking book." *American Historical Review*

"A book of great insight and intellectual depth. . . . Combining exhaustive research with lucid writing, Gorn has produced a book that is at once instructive, thought-provoking, and fascinating to read. He convincingly illustrates how boxing was transformed from an unauthorized activity of the urban bachelor sub-culture to a more respectable pastime within the entertainment industry of the late nineteenth century. In the process, he reveals how boxing dramatized the differences between Irish and Anglo-Saxon Americans, working and middle classes, wrongdoers and Christians, and perhaps most significantly, between men and women. Gorn artfully reveals the simultaneous fascination and disgust that people felt towards boxing, and the deep-seated emotional responses engendered by the sport. He captures the various meanings that prize fighting had for its participants and carefully details the ceremonies, rituals, and pageantry of the sport. *The Manly Art* is pure delight." *Journal of Sport History*

"Gorn is an adventurous historian with a talent for informed speculation. He has written an exciting narrative history of boxing and then gone a step further to ask a series of questions that extend his focus to the whole of nineteenth-century American culture." *The Nation*

"Gorn's finely conceived and craftsman-like book catches the spirit of a young nation rushing to industrialization and how prize fighting was affected by, and came to reflect, much of the national mood and character. *The Manly Art* is first-rate social history rendered in felicitous prose." *Chicago Sun-Times*

"*The Manly Art* is an important contribution to the study of nineteenth-century American culture. Writing with clarity, vigor, and grace, Gorn combines detailed narrative with convincing interpretations. He offers the reader a judicious selection of quotations from the sporting press that captures the drama, sensuality, and brutality of the ring and its craftsmen." *Journal of American History*

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