HTS 3823A
BOXING, RACE, AND AMERICAN CULTURE
M/W/F 10:05 – 10:55 (SKILES 255)

Contact Information
Dr. Johnny Smith
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Office Hours: M/W 11-Noon
Email: john.smith@hts.gatech.edu

Course Description
Boxing is not a game. People play baseball, basketball, or football, but nobody “plays” boxing. It’s a brutally violent sport, simultaneously repulsive and attractive. Between the Victorian Era and the 1970s, boxing was a prominent feature of American culture. For a long time, it was one of the most popular spectator sports in America. It was the subject of daily newspaper coverage, magazine features, radio programming, and Friday night television. It inspired paintings, photography, poetry, literature, movies, and music. But today boxing has all but disappeared from the American consciousness. How did this happen?

In this course, we will use boxing as a “magnifying glass” to study American history. We will explore how historians, journalists, promoters, fans, and filmmakers have interpreted boxing in order to better understand the importance of nationalism, race, gender, class, and social conflict in America. To do this, we will focus on the marginalized groups of people who have defined the boxing world and the three most iconic African American heavyweight champions: Jack Johnson, Joe Louis, and Muhammad Ali.
Learning Objectives
By the end of this course students should be able to:

• Understand and explain the role of boxing in the social construction of American culture over time
• Discuss how race, ethnicity, class, gender, and nationalism have shaped the meaning of boxing in America
• Critically examine primary and secondary historical sources
• Formulate their own arguments with evidence from a variety of sources and defend their views orally and in writing

Course Format
This course will be taught through lecture and class discussions. Students should prepare to be active participants in class.

Required Readings
George Kimball, At the Fights: American Writers on Boxing
Randy Roberts, Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes
David Margolick, Beyond Glory: Joe Louis vs. Max Schmeling, and a World on the Brink
David Remnick, King of the World: Muhammad Ali and the Rise of an American Hero
*Additional course readings will be posted on T-Square

Attendance and Class Participation
I do not give points for attendance. However, your success in this course is dependent upon your attendance. Students are expected to complete weekly readings and actively participate in all class discussions. Students may earn up to 50 points for class participation.

Grading and Assignments:
Exam: One in-class mid-term exam will be given. The midterm exam will consist of short-answer essay questions. Students are required to write their essay answers in a small blue book. Blue books can be purchased at the bookstore. On the day of the exam students must bring a blue book, two pens, and their student identification card. The midterm exam is worth up to 50 points. The midterm exam is scheduled for Friday, October 4.

It is a student’s responsibility to be in class for all exams. If you have a verifiable medical emergency I will allow make-up exams within one week of the scheduled exam time. You must have documentation of an emergency; otherwise I will not grant a make-up.

Response Essays: Students will be required to write three response essays of about 4-5 pages. For each essay, I will provide students with a prompt based on Papa Jack (Due 9/20), Beyond Glory (Due 10/24), and King of the World (Due 11/27). I will provide you with more details about the essays in a separate handout. Each response essay is worth up to 50 points. Late papers will NOT be accepted under any condition.
**Research Paper:**
Students will write a 10-12-page research paper analyzing a single boxing match and explain its significance in American history. The instructor must approve all essay topics. Students will submit a one-page proposal justifying their research topic and a very brief annotated bibliography that demonstrates that they have the necessary sources to write a strong research paper. The final paper must include at least five primary sources and three secondary sources (websites will not count toward this requirement). Students will receive a separate handout with more details about this assignment. The final paper will be due during the scheduled final exam time on **Wednesday, December 11th at 11:30 a.m.**

**Grading Scale**

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Response Essay 1</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>Response Essay 2</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>Response Essay 3</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Paper</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>350</strong></td>
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A: 315 points or more
B: 280 – 314 points
C: 245 – 279 points
D: 210– 244 points
F: 209 points or less

**Academic Honesty**
Students in this class will be expected to abide by the Georgia Tech honor code. Academic misconduct of any kind will not be tolerated. All students are responsible for understanding and complying with Georgia Tech rules. For information see [http://www.honor.gatech.edu](http://www.honor.gatech.edu)

**General Courtesy Guidelines**
I expect you to respect your classmates and me at all times. You are expected to be on time for class, refrain from speaking out of turn, and **turn off all electronic devices before class begins.** I will not tolerate sleeping in class, text messaging, or using your computer for any purposes other than taking notes. If you choose to use a laptop for notes, you are required to sit near the back of the room. If you engage in any kind of distracting or inappropriate behavior I reserve the right to ask you to leave the class.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**
If you have a disability that may require assistance or accommodation, or you have questions related to any accommodations for testing, note takers, readers, etc., please speak with me as soon as possible. Students may also contact the Office of Disability Services, located in the Office of the Dean of Students (ODOS). The ODS phone number is 404-894-2563.
Weekly Class Schedule

Week 1 (August 19/21/23): Course Introduction and the Origins of the “Manly Art”

Week 2 (August 26/28/30): Boxing In Antebellum America
*Friday: Special Guest Lecture: Randy Roberts on Writing Boxing History
Reading: Heywood Broun, “The Orthodox Champion” (Kimball); John Lardner, “Down Great Purple Valleys” (Kimball); A.J. Liebling, “Ahab and Nemesis” (Kimball); Gerald Early, “Ringworld” (Kimball)

Week 3 (September 2/4/6): The Boston Strong Boy: John L. Sullivan’s America
NO CLASS MONDAY – LABOR DAY
Reading: Donald B. Chidsey, “Sullivan-Flood” (T-Square); New York Times, “The Bigger Brute Won” (T-Square); Vachel Lindsay, “John L. Sullivan: The Boston Strong Boy” (T-Square)

Reading: Jack London, “Burns-Johnson” (T-Square); Jack London, “Johnson vs. Jeffries” (Kimball)

Week 5 (September 16/18/20): The Golden Age of Boxing: Tex Rickard, Jack Dempsey and the 1920s
Reading: Irvin S. Cobb, “Cobb Fights It Over Again” (Kimball); H.L. Mencken, “Dempsey vs. Carpentier” (Kimball); Gene Tunney, “My Fights with Jack Dempsey” (Kimball)
Friday: Papa Jack Response Essay Due In Class

Week 6 (September 23/25/27): The Dark Age of Boxing: The Great Depression
Reading: Horace Gregory, “Dempsey, Dempsey” (T-Square); Paul Gallico, “Pity The Poor Giant”

Week 7 (September 30/October 2/4): The Cinderella Man: James Braddock in the Worst Hard Time
Reading: Fred Van Ness, “Garden Selects Braddock to Fight Baer” (T-Square); Lonnie Harrington, “The Real Fistiana” (T-Square); John Kiernan, “Lucky Jim” (T-Square)
Friday: Midterm Exam

Week 8 (October 7/9/11): The Brown Bomber: Joe Louis
Reading: Sherwood Anderson, “Brown Bomber” (Kimball); Bob Considine, “Louis Knocks Out Schmeling” (Kimball); Richard Wright, “High Tide in Harlem” (Kimball);

Week 9 (October 14/16/18): Joe Louis and World War II
NO CLASS MONDAY – FALL RECESS
Week 10 (October 21/23/24): James Norris, Frankie Carbo, the IBC, and the Decline of Boxing  
**Friday: Beyond Glory Response Essay Due In Class**  

Week 11 (October 28/30/November 1): Rocky Marciano and Boxing Noir  
Reading: Red Smith, “Night for Joe Louis” (Kimball); Frank Graham, “As It Was in the Long Ago” (Kimball); Budd Schulberg, “A Champion Proves His Greatness” (T-Square)

Week 12 (November 4/6/8): It’s A Man’s World: Emile Griffith and Benny “The Kid” Paret

Week 13 (November 11/13/15): Floyd Patterson, Sonny Liston, and Cassius Clay
Reading: James Baldwin, “The Fight: Patterson vs. Liston” (Kimball); Gay Talese, “Floyd Patterson” (Kimball); Murray Kempton, “The Champ and the Chump” (Kimball)

Week 14 (November 18/20/22): Kings of the World: Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier, and George Foreman  
Reading: Norman Mailer, “The Fight” (Kimball); William Nack, “The Fight’s Over, Joe” (Kimball)

Week 15 (November 25/27/29): Rocky’s America  
**Wednesday: King of the World Response Essay Due**  
NO CLASS FRIDAY – THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 16 (December 2/4/6): Mike Tyson and the Decline of Boxing  
Reading: Joyce Carol Oates, “Rape and the Boxing Ring” (Kimball); David Remnick, “Kid Dynamite Blows Up: Mike Tyson” (Kimball)

Final Exam Week (December 9-14)  
RESEARCH PAPER DUE IN CLASS ON WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11th 11:30 a.m.