



HTS 3803
BOXING, RACE, AND AMERICAN CULTURE
M/W/F 10:05 – 10:55 (VAN LEER C456)

Contact Information

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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 spectacle in 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 role nationalism, race, gender, class, violence, 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*

Randy Roberts and Johnny Smith, *Blood Brothers: The Fatal Friendship Between Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X* (available February 2, 2016)

***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:

Exams: Students will take two exams. The midterm exam will consist of short-answer identifications and a longer essay question. Students are required to write their essay answers in a small blue book. On the day of the exam students must bring a blue book, and two pens. The midterm exam is worth up to 50 points. The midterm exam is scheduled for **Friday, February 26**. The final exam will follow a similar format as the midterm and is also worth up to 50 points. The final exam is scheduled for **Monday, May 2nd**.

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 2/12), *Beyond Glory* (Due 3/18), and *Blood Brothers* (Due 4/23). 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.

Grading Scale

Participation	50 Points
Midterm Exam	50 Points
Response Essay 1	50 Points
Response Essay 2	50 Points
Response Essay 3	50 Points
Final Exam	50 Points
Total	300 Points

- 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>

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 (January 11/13/15): Course Introduction and the Origins of the “Manly Art”

Week 2 (January 20/22): Boxing In Antebellum America

Reading: Elliott J. Gorn, “The Meanings of Prizefighting” (T-Square)

Week 3 (January 25/27/29): The Boston Strong Boy: John L. Sullivan’s America

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)

Week 4 (February 1/3/5): Unforgiveable Blackness: Jack Johnson and the Color Line in the Progressive Era

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

Week 5 (February 8/10/12): 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 (February 15/17/19): The Dark Age of Boxing: The Great Depression

Reading: Horace Gregory, “Dempsey, Dempsey” (T-Square); Paul Gallico, “Pity The Poor Giant”; Lonnie Harrington, “The Real Fisticiana” (T-Square); John Kiernan, “Lucky Jim” (T-Square)

Week 7 (February 22/24/26): 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)

Friday: Midterm Exam

Week 8 (February 29/March 2/4): James Norris, Frankie Carbo, the IBC, and Corruption in Boxing

Week 9 (March 7/9/11): The Harder They Fall: Boxing Noir

Week 10 (March 14/16/18): Rocky Marciano and Sugar Ray Robinson

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)

Friday: *Beyond Glory* Response Essay Due In Class

Week 11 (March 21/23/25): **SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS**

Week 12 (March 28/30/April 1): It’s A Man’s World: Emile Griffith and Benny Paret

Week 13 (April 4/6/8): 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 (April 11/13/15): 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 (April 18/20/23): Rocky’s America; Mike Tyson and the Decline of Boxing
Friday: *King of the World* Response Essay Due

Week 16 (April 25): Review for the final exam

Final Exam: Monday, May 2nd