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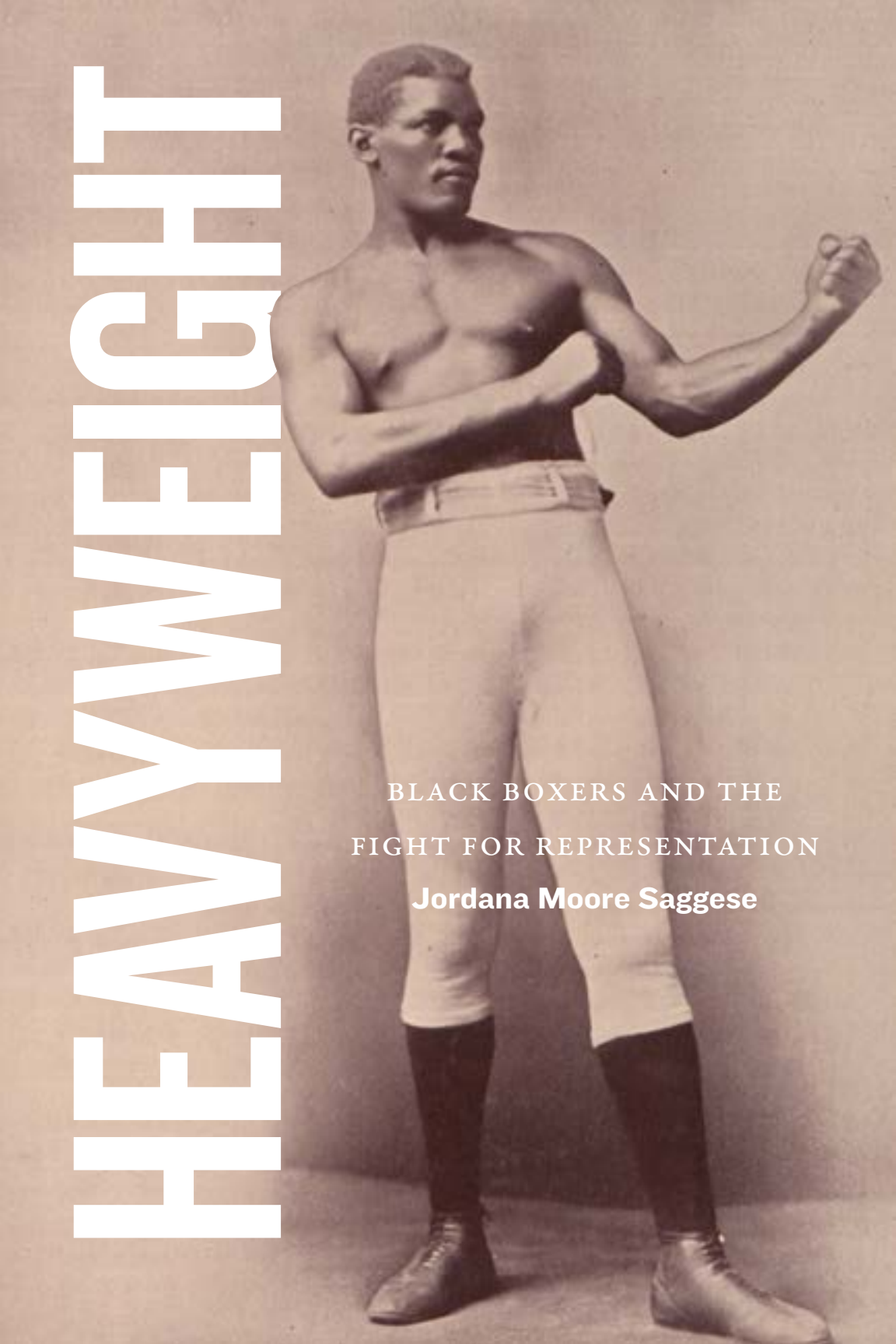

BLACK BOXERS AND THE FIGHT FOR REPRESENTATION

Jordana Moore Saggese

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Preface

I came to this book project from a very personal place. In the spring and summer of 2012, I followed the coverage of two intersecting incidents of racial violence—one in Europe and the other in the United States. The first was the murder of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman in Sanford, Florida. Martin, a Black boy wearing a black hooded sweatshirt, was followed by Zimmerman on the night of February 26 as he walked from a nearby convenience store to the Twin Lakes townhome community, where the boy's father was living at the time. On a phone call to the Sanford Police dispatch, Zimmerman was instructed to stay in his vehicle and avoid approaching the boy. Instead, Zimmerman (a former neighborhood watch captain) got into a violent encounter with Martin that ended with a fatal gunshot. Trayvon died just seventy yards from the rear door of the townhouse where he was staying.

What struck me, and many others, about this incident was the immediate perceived threat Zimmerman described upon encountering the boy. In police reports Zimmerman identified Martin as "a real suspicious guy." Was he "suspicious" because he was a Black kid in a predominantly white neighborhood? Because he was wearing a hoodie? Because he was, at more than a decade younger, four inches taller than Zimmerman? In fact, although Martin's autopsy showed that the boy was five feet eleven and weighed 158 pounds at the time

of his death, a popular rumor spread on social media that summer alleging that the media-circulated image of Trayvon was an outdated image. These critics claimed that Martin was six feet two and had a muscular build of 175 pounds.[1] When Zimmerman was acquitted of second-degree murder the next year, I began to wonder about the perceived physical threat of an unarmed Black boy.

Just a few months after Martin's murder I found myself engulfed by the press coverage surrounding the 2012 UEFA European Football Championship, which began in early June and coincided with my family's annual trip to Italy. While not a regular spectator of this sport (or of any sport, for that matter) I became fascinated by the presence of a Black player on the Italian team, Mario Balotelli. Coming into the competition, Balotelli had already been the subject of racial slurs and abuse. In April 2009, fans of the Juventus team in Italy famously sang "There are no Black Italians" during a match against Inter Milan, Balotelli's team at the time. In later matches, fans from opposing teams were known to throw bananas onto the pitch when Balotelli played. In media coverage leading up to the 2012 Euros, Balotelli warned: "I will not accept racism at all. It's unacceptable. If someone throws a banana at me in the street, I will go to jail, because I will kill them."[2] Nevertheless, a few weeks later, an image began to circulate of a match steward holding a banana, which was thrown onto the pitch while Balotelli played for Italy in a June 14 match against Croatia. The photographer who captured the shot reported hearing monkey noises directed at Balotelli from the stands.

While not explicitly related to one another, these acts nevertheless coalesced in my mind that summer for their bold assertions of Black subjection.[3] Somehow all this was happening—in the United States and in Europe—in public view; we were all experiencing anti-Blackness in real time. I began to ask myself then, and I still ask myself now, how does this happen? How do Black men become dehumanized, positioned as threats? How is it that Black men are so hyper-visible in popular culture, yet remain disempowered in political culture? And where does this genealogy begin?

Examples of the Black athlete (and of the Black athlete's body in particular) as a problem for mainstream Americans have proliferated in the twenty-first century. Take, for example, the April 2008 cover of *Vogue* magazine, which featured Brazilian model Gisele Bündchen alongside the twenty-one-year-old NBA player LeBron James for an issue on the "best bodies."[4] Dressed in a green, shimmering, strapless gown, Bündchen appears on the right of the composition in a running pose. She lunges forward on her right leg while her opposite arm bends at her side; an industrial fan blows her hair back, visually emphasizing her efforts to move toward the viewer (and presumably escape James). And as

we look closer, we see that Bündchen, although giggling for the camera, is being held back. The basketball forward's left hand holds the model at the waist and constricts her movement.

In contrast to the supposedly lighthearted appearance—in both costume and pose—of his companion, James appears in dark clothing, squatting downward, and with a grimace. The sections of his body that are revealed to us outside his black athletic shorts and tank top appear contracted and taut, like James's face, which has opened widely to reveal what seems to be a scream. It took me only a moment to recognize that this image—printed on the cover of a magazine with 1.1 million monthly readers and shot by the renowned photographer Annie Leibovitz—intentionally positions James as an oversexualized brute, with Bündchen as the damsel in distress.[5] The blogger Rogers Cadenhead discovered a potential source for Leibovitz's composition—a 1917 World War I recruitment poster entitled "Destroy This Mad Brute," which translated the threat of a German invasion into a racist and sexually charged scene. Perhaps intended as a clever take on James's nickname (i.e., King James as King Kong) and despite the forced smile that may have been intended to camouflage Liebowitz's leveraging of racist history, the image nevertheless rehearses a catalog of stereotypes assigned to Black men. Here we see James as the savage, oversexualized Black brute, perfectly poised as a threat to the white woman in his grasp.

Also consider the images of kneeling Black football players that dominated the global press in the fall of 2016, during the run-up to the US presidential election. Initially started by San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick, kneeling during the national anthem was a protest against the murders of unarmed Black men by police. This was just a few months after the murder of thirty-two-year-old Philando Castile, who was shot seven times during a traffic stop in a suburb of Saint Paul, Minnesota, on July 6, 2016. Castile's death, which was recorded and livestreamed on Facebook by his girlfriend in the passenger seat, ignited a fresh wave of protest. Kaepernick's version began on August 26, when he refused to stand up from his seat on the player's bench for the anthem preceding a home game against the Green Bay Packers. After the game, he explained his decision in an exclusive interview with NFL media: "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people and people of color. . . . To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people [are] getting paid leave and getting away with murder."[6] The backlash, however, was immediate. Within forty-eight hours, on September 3, Kaepernick was replaced as a starting quarterback; national attention to the controversy increased when President Obama defended Kaepernick's actions as a "consti-

tutional right" during a press conference for the G20 summit in China on September 5. The next day the NFL commissioner, Roger Goodell, issued his own statement, which intimated Kaepernick's actions as unpatriotic.

On September 8, the first Sunday of the 2016 NFL season, it became clear that the predominantly Black players were on Kaepernick's side. Players for the Indiana Colts wore warm-up shirts that read "Black Lives Matter," and the New England Patriots' new quarterback Cam Newton wore cleats that read "7 shots" (a reference to Castile) and "No Justice, No Peace." Players on other teams, such as the Detroit Lions, the Miami Dolphins and even the 49ers, locked arms with one another along the sideline during the anthem—a gesture most frequently used by protestors as a mode of protection (i.e., a way to defend against the removal of a single individual) and as a visualization of solidarity.[7] The protests endured throughout the first years of Donald J. Trump's presidency and continued even after Kaepernick left the 49ers. At a rally in Alabama in 2017 Trump told the crowd that NFL owners should eject kneeling players from the game: "Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, to say, 'Get that son of a bitch off the field right now. Out! He's fired. He's fired!"[8]

From my vantage point as an art historian, I was compelled by the number of images that came out of this debate. Each week there were dozens upon dozens of photographs of Black men kneeling on the sidelines every Sunday, deploying whatever cultural capital they had as successful athletes in the most lucrative professional sporting league in the United States. And then there was the image of Kaepernick on the cover of *Time* magazine on October 3, 2016, under the headline "The Perilous Fight." Situated on a black ground—that is, removed completely from the context of an NFL game—he appears alone. We notice that even the bold red letters of the masthead have been transformed into a medium gray. Kaepernick, in his full 49ers uniform, kneels so that his right knee touches the ground at the center of a glowing circle created by a single light source projected downward onto the figure, suggesting an ethereal glow. Kaepernick's face is turned slightly upward as his eyes rest on something outside the frame, as if caught in a moment of quiet contemplation. Through the devices of composition, pose, gesture, and light, Kaepernick is transformed here into a martyr.

Just over a year after this saintly appearance—and following several unsuccessful attempts to secure a contract with an NFL team for the 2017 season—Kaepernick appeared once again on the cover of a mainstream magazine. However, the November 2017 issue of *GQ*, a men's magazine that advertises itself as a guide to men's fashion, fitness, and health, shows a very different Colin Kaeper-

nick. This figure appears in a closely cropped frame and he gazes directly into the lens of the camera. He has substituted an NFL uniform for an all-black ensemble of turtleneck and leather blazer; a gold pendant hangs from his neck. And instead of the neat cornrows that we saw a year earlier, Kaepernick has styled his hair as a picked-out Afro that radiates outward and takes up the entire top-third of the composition. No longer the martyr, this version of Kaepernick explicitly relies on the visual iconography of the Black Power movement to assert his alignment with their cause. He appeared in the interior of the magazine with a single fist raised above his head.

Contemporary Black athletes undoubtedly occupy a dual function within white mainstream media—as a body that is both criminalized and commodified simultaneously.[9] This is territory well-tread by contemporary sociologists and historians, who have taken up the relationship between sports and cultural formation in the last three decades. And in many ways, this book is built on the foundation of that scholarship. But what I am most interested in is the ways these bodies and their images function within the white cultural imagination and rehearse a genealogy of Blackness rooted in violence, abjection, and even desire.

This book is organized around the constitutive power of images, as theorized by Stuart Hall in the early 1990s. In his lecture "Representation and the Media" from 1997 Hall clarifies the difference between a common understanding of representation (i.e., as representing a meaning that is somehow already there) and his own understanding of representation as "enter[ing] into the constitution of the object that we are talking about. It is part of the object itself; it is constitutive of it. It is one of its conditions of existence, and therefore representation is not outside the event, not after the event, but within the event itself."[10] These images function not only as art objects but also as cultural artifacts. They illustrate how Black bodies are viewed by white audiences (regardless of gender or sexual orientation), connecting back even to Reconstruction-era expressions of white, mainstream anxieties and fantasies about the Black body.

Heavyweight is about the place of athletes within a visual history of Blackness with an equal investment in the production and the reception of these images. It explores representations of Black boxers and considers the ways in which these images have transformed our understanding of Black masculinity. I argue that we can find lurking in these images the blueprint for our conceptions of the Black male body as existing somewhere between fear and fantasy, simultaneously an object of desire and an instrument of brutal violence. This historical tension between the violent and the erotic dimensions of the boxer lays bare our societal ambivalence toward Blackness, and the increasingly ambiguous role of

Black men in American culture. There is a politics to this work, to exploring the past to navigate our present. *Heavyweight* looks back in order to move forward.

And finally, I would like to note that some of the images and ideas discussed in the pages that follow are racist and problematic. They have been included here because we must better understand the past in order to build a more inclusive future.

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It has been a unique privilege to carry out the research that has culminated in this book, but I would not have been able to do so without the generous support of many individuals and institutions. And so, let me use this opportunity to express my gratitude. First, to the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, which provided me an opportunity to think deeply about the nineteenth century in a way that transformed the trajectory of this book. I benefited greatly from the many informal and formal conversations with my colleagues there, from the ingenuity of the librarians, and from the patience of the guard staff who allowed me to sit on the first floor with George Bellows's painting *Both Members of This Club* for many, many hours. Thank you also to the Department of Art History and Archaeology at the University of Maryland, and specifically to department chairs Meredith Gill and Steven Mansbach, as well as the graduate students in my fall 2019 graduate seminar "The Athletic Turn," who rigorously and enthusiastically explored the world of sports representation with me. The University of Maryland's Independent Scholarship, Research, and Creativity Award allowed me to take time off from teaching to finish this manuscript. And it has been a joy to work with the students Talia Desai, Claire Rasmussen, JooHee Kim, and Nan Zhong, all of whom performed research on my behalf and humored my often-ambiguous requests for information.

In the decade or so that I have been invested in this topic I have had the opportunity to present portions of my research in several venues, including conferences of the College Art Association and the American Studies Association, and lectures at Vanderbilt University, the University of California, Santa Barbara, the University of Pittsburgh, and New York University. I am grateful to the audiences in each of these places, who provided generous commentary and feedback throughout the development of the book. Anyone who knows me will also know that I am forever indebted to the writers who have shared collaborative and critical space with me (in person and virtually) for the last fifteen years. Thank you to my East Bay Writers Group—Kim Anno, Paula Birnbaum, Irene Cheng, Tirza Latimer, Rachel Schreiber, Jenny Shaw—for their patience with me and their guidance as this project found its footing in its earliest days. And thank you to Valerie Heffernan and Shatha Almuwatha for their constant accountability. Nicole Archer, Nijah Cunningham, and Jessica Ingram offered support throughout a most challenging time (not only for writing but also for just living in general) and demonstrated a considerably high tolerance of my cheesy gifs. I am also grateful to Ken Wissoker, whose last-minute meeting with me in Chicago in February 2020 allowed the manuscript to come into closer view.

I finally sat down to start this manuscript—after many years of scattered research—in March 2020 just days before a global lockdown. With three kids at home, I did not know if I was going to make it. And I surely would not have without the support of my husband, Giampaolo, as well as the understanding of my children—especially the oldest two. I hope that they will all one day recognize the gift that they have given me in allowing me the time and space to pursue my own projects while also being their mother.

Introduction

The 1965 photograph of boxer Muhammad Ali (1942–2016) standing victorious in the center of the ring after securing (for the second time) the world heavyweight title remains one of the most recognizable images of the twentieth century (fig. I.1).[1] Ali appears in the center of the frame, standing upright inside the ropes while his opponent Sonny Liston (1932?–70) lays prone on the canvas after a surprise knockout in the first round. Positioned as the aggressor, Ali glares directly downward at Liston, teeth gnashed. Ali's right arm is bent, acting as a frame for the developed musculature of the arm and torso—the physical origin of the punch that has created this dramatic scene. The image, captured ringside by Associated Press photographer John Rooney, appeared on dozens of sports pages across the United States the next morning and received first prize for a single sports photograph in the World Press Photo contest of 1965.[2] It was also the lead image for Ali's obituary, which appeared upon his death in June 2016. When I type "Muhammad Ali" into my browser's search bar, it is the second image that appears on the screen. This photograph is what many of us see, in our mind's eye, when we think of Muhammad Ali.

To understand the weight of this image within the story of Ali, within the history of boxing, or even within US culture, we might turn to the word "iconic." An "iconic" image exists outside history; it is a type of representation that makes us forget we are looking at an image at all.[3] Art historians may be

I.1

"Muhammad Ali Stands over Fallen Challenger Sonny Liston," 1965. Photograph by John Rooney, 13.5 × 18 inches. David C. Driskell Center, University of Maryland, College Park. Gift of Sandra and Lloyd Baccus.

tempted to overlook such images, passively accepting them as true and perhaps even as representative of a set of universal values. Such images are victim to the enduring Hegelian unconscious within the discipline. That is, on the one hand a work of art embodies the specific values of the culture or society that produced it, but on the other hand the discipline puts more emphasis on those images that exceed their specific time and place or that express (in Hegel's term) an "absolute idea." Such impulses force us to focus on the classical composition of Rooney's photograph, which echoes in part the stage-like space and clear narratives of the neoclassical style.[4] We immediately fixate on the dramatic action of the subject, the binary of the victor and the vanquished—all at the expense of historical specificity.

On its face, this image communicates victory. We see an illustration of an American hero. This is the narrative of Ali that we have brought into our present: Ali as a champion, as the "titan of the twentieth century," as the proud recipient of a Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2005. Memorialized in his obituary for the *New York Times*, Ali "became something of a secular saint, a legend in soft focus. He was respected for having sacrificed more than three years of his boxing prime and untold millions of dollars for his antiwar principles after being banished from the ring; he was extolled for his un-self-conscious gallantry in the face of incurable illness, and he was beloved for his accommodating sweetness in public."[5] And while we may at first accept this image as nothing more than a portrait of a great boxer in the prime of his career, what might happen if we reoriented ourselves to a historical reading of this image? What if we were to dislodge it from its status as icon and consider instead its place within a wider visual and cultural history—of boxing and of Blackness? What if we used Rooney's photograph as an opportunity to think through the historical legacies of Black heavyweight boxers and their role in shaping a visual economy of Black masculinity?

Heavyweight questions the gap between popular culture and critical culture, looking at the sport of boxing specifically as a performance of cultural values. I am working from the example of contemporary sports scholars, who have argued quite convincingly that the study of sports is intrinsic to any account of the American past.[6] The intersections of sports with issues of labor, capitalism, and urban studies underscore its importance as a cultural practice. Its role in constructing identities based on gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality highlight the political dimension of something we might at first think of as "just a game." And for the Black athlete specifically, sports hold even more critical significance. In a 2011 special issue of the *Journal of African American History*, Scott Brooks and Dexter Blackman acknowledged "African Americans' use of

sports as a mechanism for demonstrating their humanity, equality, or superiority to whites on the playing fields; and as a source of racial pride and a means to upward social mobility."[7] However, it would be another ten years before the specific subfield of African American sports history would be acknowledged.[8] This was possible, in part, due to the emergence of a class of sports historians invested in a methodology informed by Black studies. These historians acknowledge the ways that African American sports connect to larger conversations in African American history. In 2021, Amira Rose Davis wrote that this "new direction" in sports history—exemplified by the work of Amy Bass, Adrian Burgos Jr., Theresa Runstedtler, Maureen Smith, Louis Moore, Derrick E. White, and Davis herself—"asks how sport and the critical scholarship on it change our understandings of African American sports history."[9] These scholars have all shown that the study of sports and its athletes provides a unique way into thinking about Blackness writ large. *Heavyweight* attempts to brings these frameworks into the visual realm.[10] More specifically, I am interested in the ways that images of athletes (boxers, in particular) have been a means to produce difference.[11]

While often overlooked as topics of study within art history, or outright dismissed on account of their connections to popular culture, these athletes and their representations produce specific knowledges about Black male subjectivity. I read images like that of Ali from 1965 not as "iconic" but as historical, and embedded within a web of political and social debates about race and masculinity that begin in the Reconstruction period. I am writing a visual history of boxing and of Blackness because we cannot separate one from the other; both involve a fight for recognition. *Heavyweight* argues for the history of sports as a critical part of the visual history of Black men in the United States. The representations studied in this book (and to some extent the sport of boxing itself) play a critical role within an ecology of white violence.

Looking again at this 1965 representation of Muhammad Ali from the perspective of sports history, for example, introduces a layer of complexity that we do not immediately see in the photograph. Despite the construction of the image as a moment of athletic triumph, the events surrounding it are much more ambivalent. Controversy surrounded this particular fight, even before the opening bell. Ali entered this challenge for the heavyweight title amid a public fall from grace. As a member of the Nation of Islam, an organization viewed both by the federal government and the white public as a hate group, Ali had recently become a more vocal supporter of racial segregation. His opponent Sonny Liston was in a similarly precarious position, having been recently charged and arrested for speeding, reckless driving, and carrying a concealed

weapon.[12] In fact, just before this match, the WBA stripped Ali of his title and dropped him from its rankings, along with Liston.

But just a few years before this photograph Ali had been an American hero, an ideal athlete embraced equally by both white and Black fans. This had been the case for most of Ali's professional career, starting in 1960 when the eighteen-year-old from Louisville, Kentucky, captured the attention of the world through his unconventional approach to the sport and a tendency to speak almost exclusively in verse. Ali's fighting style was more rhythmic than other boxers and included an unparalleled footwork that allowed him to evade other fighters in the ring. His superior head movement made it difficult for opponents to connect their punches. Ali coined the term "dancing jab" to describe the way he bounced (often on tiptoes) around the ring while delivering unexpected, flicking jabs to the head that produced a whiplash effect. Still a teenager, Ali traveled to Rome to represent the United States in the 1960 Olympics.[13]

While there, he functioned as a surrogate for democracy. When asked by a Soviet reporter after the award ceremony to express his feelings about winning gold for a country that would not allow him to eat at a lunch counter in his hometown, Ali promptly responded: "To me, the USA is still the best country in the world, counting yours."[14] Proclaiming him a national hero, dozens of newspapers printed this incendiary statement, which the boxer would later deny. Ali soaked it up, announcing in his trademark poetic style:

> To make America the greatest is my goal
> So I beat the Russian and I beat the Pole
> And for the USA won the medal of Gold.[15]

After returning from Rome, Ali made the decision to turn professional, and an increasingly exuberant and braggadocious presence in the media soon followed.[16] He openly goaded and mocked opponents, and in media appearances he continuously bragged equally about his fighting skills and his physical beauty. "It's hard to be humble," he purportedly said, "when you're as great as I am."[17] Such proclamations made many audiences uncomfortable; Black athletes were expected to quietly succeed and openly conform to the expectations of white audiences.

Ali was in every way the opposite of his predecessor Joe Louis (1914–81)—the Black heavyweight champion who held the title from 1937 to 1949. Working in the shadow of Jack Johnson, whose boxing career (discussed further in chapter 4) ended subsumed by controversy and even a criminal conviction, Louis's managers were quick to set down some ground rules for the fighter. According to his biographer, Randy Roberts, "Louis was instructed never to humiliate an oppo-

nent, gloat over a victory, or visit a nightclub alone." Because Johnson had been shunned for his public relationships with white women, "Louis was forbidden from ever having his photograph taken alone with a white female." He also almost never smiled in photographs, preferring a deadpan expression—again to contrast with Johnson's "golden smile." According to Roberts: "Everything Louis did, every image he projected, carried the same message: '*I am not Jack Johnson*.' No verbal boasts, no flashy smiles, no public sexual exploits—just machinelike fighting and Bible-reading innocence."[18] The public image of Louis, known as "the Black Clark Gable," was consciously and continuously shaped in response to white expectations. Ali by contrast seemed boastful, arrogant, and eager to insert himself into American politics and the Civil Rights movement. His open challenge to expectations of the white public engendered public disapproval, and in his early professional career crowds frequently booed when he came into the arena.

The rhetorical structure of boxing requires that the men competing inside the ring be ideologically positioned as opposites—one dominant, one submissive, and both competing for total control. In the early twentieth century, when title fights included both Black and white opponents, the antagonism was explicitly racist. The Black heavyweight Jack Johnson was billed in his 1910 match against James J. Jeffries (1875–1953) as "the Black Peril," with Jeffries as the "Great White Hope." But as the twentieth century progressed and more and more title fights occurred between two Black fighters, the racial antagonism at the heart of boxing persisted in a new form.[19] And the unfixed nature of Black male subjectivity was further exposed. For the matches between Ali and Liston, for example, the two men oscillated between the roles of "hero" and "villain."

In the lead-up to Ali's first heavyweight title fight against Liston, who was at the time the reigning champion, in February 1964, few believed that the young fighter from Kentucky stood a chance. Two days before the fight, the sportswriter Arthur Daley wrote under the headline "Boy on a Man's Errand" that "the loudmouth from Louisville is likely to have a lot of vainglorious boasts jammed down his throat by a ham-like fist belonging to Sonny Liston."[20] Liston, thirty-one years old at the time, was an ex-convict with rumored associations with the New York mafia; his reputation as a "bad Negro" was already well worn. Many feared Liston's long reach and formidable power; in the previous two title fights, Liston famously knocked out his opponent, Floyd Patterson, in the very first round. But his reputation nevertheless eclipsed his athletic talents, and the media's attention emphasized associations with Black stereotypes. Journalists often described him as a "gorilla" or "jungle beast." Even after winning the heavyweight title in 1962, the harassment continued. One writer for the *Philadelphia Daily*

News wrote: "A celebration for Philadelphia's first heavyweight champ is now in order . . . Emily Post would probably recommend a ticker-tape parade. For confetti we can use torn-up arrest warrants."[21] Liston did in fact have multiple run-ins with the police, even as a professional boxer. In 1961 he was arrested by a patrolman for loitering, despite Liston's claims that he had merely been signing autographs and chatting with fans. Throughout his professional career and afterward, Liston was haunted by the specter of stereotyping, where Black men are framed as intrinsically aggressive brutes—all brawn and no brains.

When Ali emerged victorious in that 1964 match, defeating Liston in the seventh round to the surprise and adulation of a roaring crowd, he became the David to Liston's Goliath, suddenly and enthusiastically embraced by the media.[22] But fewer than forty-eight hours passed before Ali's celebrity became clouded by politics. The morning after his ceremonious defeat of Liston in Miami, he confirmed his membership in the Nation of Islam at a press conference after a reporter abruptly asked if he was a "card-carrying member of the Black Muslims"—a phrasing that carried with it echoes of McCarthyism.[23] In fact, a majority of the white American public misinterpreted Ali's public alignment with the Nation of Islam as communist sympathy. Two weeks later, the new champion announced he had taken the name Muhammad Ali, granted to him by Elijah Muhammad. And eight months later, when Ali fought Floyd Patterson (1935–2006) right before Thanksgiving for the WBC world heavyweight title, he was suddenly repositioned as the renegade with Patterson as the more respectable figure.

The match between Ali and Patterson was well publicized, alongside several carefully orchestrated media events leading up to the fight. For example, after Ali nicknamed Patterson "the Rabbit" (playing up the idea that the challenger was terrified of taking on the heavyweight champion), he showed up at one of Patterson's training sessions with a bag of carrots. Ali also reportedly called Patterson an "Uncle Tom" for refusing to call him "Muhammad Ali."[24] The media encouraged their (mostly theatrical) rivalry with several carefully orchestrated events leading up to the fight. The fight, according to the art historian Kobena Mercer, was "an anchoring point for opposing positions in racial discourse."[25] Ali's position was becoming untenable; his position as a Black sports hero was increasingly shaky, not only caught in the middle of Black-white relations but in the middle of Black-Black relations as well. At this moment, we see how the spectacle of boxing exists inseparable from its history. The media continuously deployed Ali's image to construct and to contend with the political power of the Black body.

Ali's controversial affiliation with the Nation of Islam produced a rupture in the entanglements of racial discourse, sports, and politics. For the white audi-

ences that had embraced him, Ali's new affiliations led to a sudden disavowal. Referencing boxing's relationship with Cold War politics in the early twentieth century, the sportswriter Jimmy Cannon claimed that Ali's association with the Nation of Islam was a "more pernicious hate symbol than Schmeling and Nazism."[26] At the same time, Black writers and other public commentators expressed initial anxieties about the heavyweight champion's new affiliation, and, by extension, his repeated public confrontations with mainstream America. Although sports (and particularly Black athletes) had long been involved in a narrative of social progress, Ali was uniquely willing to speak forthrightly on both political and religious issues. Such candor was surprising given the precarious nature of national politics during the Cold War; under the shadow of the House Un-American Activities Committee, almost any public engagement in protest or any traces of ideological debate drew swift charges of communism and treason along with them. According to one biographer, Ali's boxing career suffered as he proved unable to secure a fight; he was barred from several cities, including his hometown of Louisville, by politicians desperate to prove their patriotism as the US presence in South Vietnam began to increase rapidly."[27] Even before his controversial refusal of induction into the US armed services, the champion found himself adrift in the American public, occupying an ambivalent position within a culture continually constructing and contending with the Black body.[28]

John Rooney's iconic photograph that opened this chapter was taken during Ali's second title fight against Liston, when he entered the ring under very different circumstances than the first match. No longer the David to Liston's Goliath, he was loudly booed by the audience when he entered the arena. Even his victory over Liston (which we appear to witness in this scene) was immediately contested. According to reports, Liston fell onto the canvas after a "phantom punch"—a controversial right hook delivered by Ali that purportedly never connected with his opponent. Some historians have even written that this image shows us Ali shouting down through his clenched teeth at Liston to get up. At this moment the binary of "good" versus "evil" on which the narrative of boxing (and of this "iconic" image) so deeply depends is breaking down. Sonny Liston, the deviant, stereotypical Black brute suddenly becomes a passive victim, forced to the ground by a newly aggressive Ali. If we only consider this image as "iconic," we misremember the controversies surrounding Ali in this fight, and we exclude the racial politics at play in this moment. Instead, to account for this image's complex context of race, sports, and geopolitics is also to account for the complications of Blackness—wherein Ali is (in the terms of curator Hamza Walker) "renigged."[29] This cycle of negation and acceptance is one that most Black athletes, including Ali, must endure.

Reading this image historically we can discern the increasingly ambivalent position of Ali (and other Black men) within the cultural imagination. We begin to recognize the ways athletic competition produces, rehearses, and regulates Blackness. The photograph captures Ali in a moment of transformation. For white audiences Ali is simultaneously an object of adulation and one of fear, while for Black audiences he becomes a symbol of the power of Black masculinity. With his exposed torso, flexed musculature, and tight grimace he takes up macho signifiers of masculinity—being tough, in control, independently minded—to compensate for a lack of political capital in the era of Jim Crow.[30] Ali was both celebrated and vilified. *Heavyweight* argues that within the context of the United States, the production and the reception of these images are deeply connected to the politics of slavery and Jim Crow. I focus here on the shifting terrain of Black masculinity, wherein Black boxers alternately serve as examples of heroic, ideal manhood and (especially when they defeat white boxers) of the subhuman nature of Blackness. But this is not only about Blackness. *Heavyweight* explores the ambivalent narratives that make up this so-called moment of Blackness as well as their explicit connections to the instability of whiteness.[31]

Art historians have previously studied the links between athletics and aesthetics, looking specifically at how these discourses of masculinity converged with artistic expression in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Martin Berger's work on the presence of athletes in works by Thomas Eakins, for example, considers the artist's paintings "as both a material expression of, *and* site for, gendering beliefs and practices."[32] In other words, Eakins's paintings played a key role in building, modifying, and even naturalizing constructs of gender for Gilded Age audiences. Marianne Doezema takes up a similar tack in her examination of the early twentieth-century boxing paintings of George Bellows (1882–1925).[33] But in both these cases, the knowledge we gain on the formation of masculine identity is always specifically white, middle class, and heterosexual. And we scarcely move outside the realm of the fine arts. In looking closely at a contemporary image like this photograph of Ali, however, we can see its meaning exceeds the athlete himself. Reading the image against its larger visual, political, and cultural context challenges the dominance of such simple, teleological narratives of Ali specifically, and of Black boxers more generally. But what would happen if we considered this image within the wider history of boxing, where in the earliest days of the sport Black athletes were caught up within narratives around the Black body and Black sexuality? Could we think about how Ali's aggressive image (coupled with those open challenges to white authority) engages visual codes of Blackness that have circulated since the time of slavery in the United States and have been consistently reinforced

over time to shore up the ideology of white supremacy? In other words, while we may be tempted to think of this image as solely a visual record of an athletic event or a record of Ali's triumph, what if we saw it instead as primary evidence of how the narrative of the Black man as eternally violent and dangerous comes to be constructed and repeated?

Academic literature on the image of Black men in visual culture has recognized the impact of athletes (and their representation) on the formation of Black subjectivity. In the 1992 essay entitled "Endangered Species" Kobena Mercer addressed the paradox of Black men in the American psyche—at once both invisible and overdetermined. Black men remain overrepresented in grim statistics, while misrepresented in the popular media via invented associations with crime, disease, and illicit drugs. Black masculinity, in Mercer's terms, is a "key site of ideological representation, a site upon which the nation's crisis comes to be dramatized, demonized, and dealt with, wherein we see not the truth of Blackness but a reaffirmation of the apparatus of white supremacy."[34] As bell hooks has similarly argued, "the Black body has always received attention within the framework of white supremacy, as racist/sexist iconography has been deployed to perpetuate notions of innate biological inferiority."[35] These are representations that have historical roots in the antebellum period in the United States, when Black bodies were marked a threat in the era leading up to and immediately following major political controversies. In the 1830s, for example, the prevalence of minstrelsy—white performers in blackface delivering songs, group performances, narrative skits, and jokes—was simultaneously rooted in the reality of white racist anxiety and in the political development of a national identity, always within and against the idea of Blackness. More than passive entertainment, these shows circulated ideologies of a primitive and pathological blackness that must be kept in check by white authority. Most important for a study of boxers, minstrelsy reaffirmed the "Black buck" stereotype of a violent, rude, even lecherous Black man who refuses to submit to white authority and has a violent attraction to white women. This trope rested on the presumption of both the extreme physical power of the Black body (uniquely suited to the demands of agricultural labor) and a deviant sexual appetite.

The overrepresentation of Black men does not provide them agency (or even individuality) but instead relies on oversimplification—a catalog of stereotypes—that directly informs whiteness in turn. We must remember that the formation of white, middle-class masculinity was always already constructed in a dialectical relationship to Blackness. At the turn of the twentieth century, W. E. B. Du Bois attempted to conceptualize the construction and the expe-

rience of race for Black Americans. In his essay "The Souls of Black Folk," Du Bois introduced the concept of the veil—a mechanism used to shut out the Black person from the mainstream while simultaneously allowing for a view to what lies just beyond reach. The veil was a metaphor for the experience of seeing (and knowing) oneself only through the apparatus of a majority culture—in Du Bois's terms, "always looking at oneself through the eyes of others."[36] Here, Blackness takes place both within and outside the individual simultaneously. The experience of being Black, Du Bois argues, takes shape on a personal as well as a social level. This is what he terms, "double consciousness," an experience of self-awareness that all Black people must negotiate.[37]

While we might be tempted to read this duality, or this twoness, as a binary, considering the veil as dialectical may in fact be more productive. As W. J. T. Mitchell argues in his lecture "The Moment of Blackness":

> The veil was not only a medium of opacity and blockage but, like the medium of photography, an instrument of "second sight" and the revelation of what would otherwise have remained invisible and concealed; or like the medium of cinema, a screen on which both realistic and fantastic images could be projected.[38]

Du Bois's veil, then, is not only a barrier but a point of connection. In the frame of the dialectic, therefore, the space between Black and white is not one of opposition but of interdependence. So, while this book traces a visual history of Blackness it does so in connection to whiteness. In focusing on Black boxers, we can discern a relationship between the Black men at the center of Rooney's photograph and the exclusively white men in the audience.

To understand boxing, we must consider not only the athletes, but the spectators as well.[39] In Rooney's photograph of the 1965 match between Muhammad Ali and Sonny Liston, we cannot help noticing the emphasis on looking. Reorienting our focus to the margins of the photograph, we see a sea of spectators surrounds the central scene and recedes upward and out of view, enveloped by darkness. Of course, when two boxers meet in the ring, they are also simultaneously on stage, under a spotlight and elevated above the audience that looks on. In this photograph we see the surrounding faces rapt with attention; a cadre of photographers in the lower right of the image stand at attention with their lenses focused on the scene before them. The forearms of one photographer, whose twin-lens camera appears just beside the left ankle of Ali, rest on the canvas itself alongside two other cameras to the left. Here we see that the sporting event and its image are inseparable, co-constituted in the ring of the

match. The spectacle of the fight itself does not only affect the athletes in the ring but transforms the viewer as well.

I am particularly interested in the ideas of expertise proposed by Walter Benjamin in direct relationship to sports and the spectacle of its performance. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," he writes:

> It is inherent in the technology of film, as of sports, that everyone who witnesses these performances does so as a quasi-expert. Anyone who has listened to a group of newspaper boys leaning on their bicycles and discussing the outcome of a bicycle race will have an inkling of this.[40]

Benjamin argues that sports are a unique way for us to render ourselves as experts. In this vein, *Heavyweight* explores how images of Black heavyweight boxers provide an opportunity for white spectators to render themselves as experts on Blackness and Black masculinity.

As a sport that is both visual and corporeal, boxing and its place within visual history seems particularly worthy of our reexamination. After all, in most other major spectator sports (e.g., baseball, football, basketball, hockey, soccer) we have a field, a team, a ball, a hoop, a goal. Boxing has none of these. What we have in boxing are two figures wearing thin, silk boxing trunks and leather boxing gloves, and a square, elevated platform surrounded by ropes. The emphasis remains on these two bodies and their physicality alone. The specifically corporal nature of the sport is reaffirmed by both the standard boxing uniform, which leaves most of the athlete's body exposed, and by the sheer quantity of images devoted to reproducing that body for our visual consumption. Unlike other sports, where images of athletes are primarily taken of the body in the direct pursuit of an athletic feat, the sport of boxing produces a landscape of images before, during, and after the match—a collection of images in excess of the action of the match itself. This is perhaps due to the unique nature of the sport, wherein athletes rely on promoters and agents to arrange matches and are paid most directly by ticket sales. We see boxers fighting, but we also see them training; we find them posing for the camera for promotional photographs and performing for the audience during a match. The body of the professional boxer is continuously exposed to our gaze.

While we might more typically think of the boxer's body as the site of physical, corporeal power, we also find elements of sexual desire and pleasure. In the words of Joyce Carol Oates, "one might wonder if the boxing match leads irresistibly to this moment: the public embrace of two men who otherwise, in public or in private, could never approach each other with such passion."[41] As the boxers carefully negotiate which parts of the exposed body are open to or

restricted from blows, the action of the match and the pleasure we derive from watching it center on the boxer's ability to escape or endure pain. For the viewer of a boxing match the physical sensation of pleasure is superseded by spectatorship; we cannot touch these fighters, but we consume them instead visually. The boxing match transforms the viewer into voyeur. As we will see in chapter 3 of this book, the visual culture of pornography and that of boxers existed in parallel in the nineteenth-century United States. The composition of many promotional photographs that circulated in this period and after, which show a nearly nude boxer alone in the frame, allows for the viewer to create a one-to-one fantasy with the photographic subject. The sexual dimension of the sport positions these Black men as objects of both fear and fantasy. The body of the heavyweight boxer is of interest—on the one hand an object of perfect symmetry, an expression of the aesthetic ideal, and on the other hand an instrument of extreme violence. As viewers, we oscillate between the admiration and the explicit fear of this body's brutal power.

When I began writing this book, I set out with the intention of considering the present. However, in looking at press photographs of Muhammad Ali, we realize that these images were embedded within a history of representation that began long ago. Before Muhammad Ali there was Jack Johnson (1878–1946)—another sensational Black boxer who rose to prominence in the early twentieth century as the first Black world heavyweight champion and suffered a very public downfall shortly afterward, a victim of his own success. But before Johnson we also have a history of Black boxers that stretches back to the last quarter of the nineteenth century, men who were denied the opportunity to fight for a world title but who nevertheless played a formative role in the public perception of Blackness. As many cultural critics have argued that one cannot understand the current state of anti-Blackness without going back to the formative moment of slavery and the failures of Reconstruction, *Heavyweight* similarly takes up the late nineteenth century—a transformative period in both the reconstruction of the nation and in the sport of boxing.

Looking back to the earliest visual histories of Black boxers in the United States also shows that these men were more than athletes; they were celebrities, the imago of Blackness. Contemporary newspapers reported on their travel habits, their diets and training regimens, their sartorial choices, and even their romantic lives. These Black men were among the most reproduced in a thriving media culture, and as such should be considered as part of the visual record of Blackness. Images of Black boxers circulated widely and internationally in the nineteenth century—in news media, in cabinet cards, in films, even on tobacco tins. Alongside the circulation of these images, we also find the circulation of

ideas about Blackness—many of which persist into our present. Ideas of the Black man as inherently violent and dangerous, as lacking in subjectivity, and as a sexual predator are all represented in the figure of the Black heavyweight boxer. As we will see in the following chapters, these were stereotypes explicitly cultivated in visual representation. Once slavery ended, images of Black boxers in popular newspapers and magazines were one of the primary means for the white public to reinforce the linkage between Blackness and depravity, insolence, and savagery. Throughout this book we will examine the connections between white racial dominance and manhood that preoccupied middle-class America in this period, a moment in which we find the origins for what the historian Gail Bederman has called "a racially based ideology of male power" that has very real consequences today.[42]

This study of boxing, race, and masculinity begins in the nineteenth century because we cannot understand Muhammad Ali without taking a closer look at the visual and cultural history of the period that preceded him. *Heavyweight* attends to this forgotten genealogy to expose the operative white supremacy that has always already been in play with Black men in American culture. While we may more easily connect other types of Black representation and performance—lynching or minstrelsy—from the Reconstruction period within a schema of anti-Blackness, the images of Black boxers are more complicated. Looking closely at these earlier images allows us to think more carefully about the politics of our practice, to explore the unconscious structures that produce our knowledge about Blackness, and to intervene in an art history that privileges the image over the cultural event. We find here not only origins for corporeal stereotypes about Black masculinity but also expose the roots of anti-Black violence in the United States. In this way I am not only interested in the images themselves but in the conditions of possibility they produce for Black men.

A HALF CENTURY BEFORE the Ali-Liston fight, on December 26, 1908, or more appropriately "Boxing Day," the Black heavyweight fighter Jack Johnson finally met Canadian Tommy Burns (1881–1955) in Sydney, Australia, for a world championship battle (fig. I.2).[43] At this point Johnson had been chasing Burns for more than a year, trying to lure the white champion into the ring, and the public anticipation became palpable. Spectators began to line up outside ticket windows at 2:30 a.m. (i.e., more than eight hours before the scheduled start of the match), and thousands were waiting outside the stadium gates when the 250 police officers arrived to open the venue.[44] According to reporters on the scene, the sky that day "was threatening, and in the dark clouds, the

I.2

Illustration marking the Burns-Johnson fight, Sydney, December 26, 1908. Charles Kerry Collection, National Library of Australia.

augurs read an omen of disaster, for that huge crowd was aggressively white in its sympathy."[45]

In the months preceding the fight, Burns and Johnson had endured a prolonged debate through a variety of media outlets; the fighters went back and forth in challenges filled with taunting and blatant racism. But it seemed that Burns, despite his professed willingness to fight, was wary of entering the ring with the Black fighter. According to Johnson, his search for an opponent during this period was exhausting: "It was fatiguing to listen to [Burns's] miles & miles of excuses. For the last few years, I have been half round the world trying to secure boxing matches but on the whole it seemed to me that I had not been successful. Like Micawber, I had changed my place of abode time after time in expectation of something turning up but it never came to pass."[46] Burns turned the media's attention to his own exorbitant payment demands ($30,000 for a single fight—win, lose, or draw) in a strategy to avoid facing Johnson in the ring. While on tour in Australia, Burns met with questions from reporters about his willingness to fight Johnson. According to Johnson's biographer, Geoffrey C. Ward, Burns "claimed that Johnson had been dodging *him*, that if Johnson—who suffered from the 'yellow streak' to which all black people were prone—wouldn't fight him, he planned to retire. 'All niggers are alike to me' he told another 'but I'll fight him even though he is a nigger,' and he would 'make it tough for Mr. Coon' when he did so."[47] In the weeks leading up to the match, press coverage dramatically increased. The *Bulletin*, an Australian national weekly paper, summarized the stakes in its post-fight coverage, claiming that the majority white spectatorship "had not come to see the fight so much as to witness a black aspirant for the championship of the world beaten to his knees and counted out."[48]

The match eventually took place, at the arrangement of the promoter Hugh McIntosh, who managed to meet Burns's demand for $30,000 and persuade Johnson to fight for one-sixth of that price. But, in his earlier proclamation, Burns clarified how consequential racial bias had been for this matchup. This was underscored by the shouts of "coon" and "nigger" that issued from the crowd of twenty-thousand spectators, as Johnson eventually entered the ring.[49] Those who had expressed a desire to see Johnson beaten, however, were disappointed after he was declared the winner in the fourteenth round by promoter-turned-referee McIntosh. While Johnson waved his hands in victory, the predominantly white crowd remained silent and stunned. The *Bulletin* struggled to spin Burns's unceremonious defeat, writing of the "heroism with which Burns took his smashing, and gamely came again and again." Nevertheless, for the first time in the history of boxing there was a Black world heavyweight champion.

The Johnson-Burns fight was certainly one of the most dramatic moments in early twentieth-century sports, but this was not the first public defeat of a white fighter by a Black opponent. Twenty-two years before that fight in Sydney, the Saint Croix–born Peter Jackson (1861–1901) won the Australian heavyweight title by knocking out Tom Lees (1858–1947) in the thirtieth round.[50] In May 1891, Jackson fought for sixty-one rounds against the American boxer James "Gentleman Jim" Corbett (1866–1933) before the referee declared a draw. These matches were almost immediately followed by Jackson's challenge of the then heavyweight champion John L. Sullivan (1858–1918). An American fighter born in Boston to Irish parents, Sullivan became the nation's first sports celebrity. He was also racist. He interrupted a theater performance in San Francisco (Peter Jackson's adopted hometown), standing up from the audience to proclaim to the room:

> Ladies and gentlemen, I wonner [*sic*] say a nigger's no good. If God wonned [*sic*] a nigger ter [*sic*] fight, why did'ne [*sic*] make him white? Nigger's no good. I'kn [*sic*] lick'im—lick any nigger. . . . A nigger can't fight. He ain't no good. Ain't as good as a white man, anyhow. No nigger is; if he was he'd be white.[51]

Incendiary statements like these were quite common for Sullivan, who possessed a predilection for self-promotion, even taking out advertisements in the sporting newspaper *National Police Gazette* to challenge members of the public to fight for prize money.[52] But in the end he never fought Jackson or any other Black fighter. When asked in 1905 by the *San Francisco Sunday Call* about his unwillingness to fight Jackson, Sullivan replied, "A white man has nothing to gain by swapping punches with a negro."[53]

Although Jackson had won the Australian heavyweight championship in 1886 and in 1892 defeated the British title holder, the closest he ever got to a world heavyweight title was his sixty-one-round draw with Corbett, who would later win the world title from John L. Sullivan in 1892. Sullivan's refusal to fight denied Jackson the opportunity to claim the American (and by default the world) heavyweight title. When reporters asked Sam Fitzpatrick, a trainer who worked closely with Jackson as well as later with welterweight Joe Walcott (1873–1935) and Jack Johnson, who was the best of the three Black pugilists, he replied, "Peter Jackson was the best man in the world and would have beaten Johnson."[54] Jackson's only limitation in the American context was his ability to secure matches with white fighters—a problem that Johnson would later face as well. We can imagine that the public reaction surrounding the Johnson-Burns

fight in 1908 was necessarily connected to this late nineteenth-century history of boxing, in which issues of race were deeply intertwined.

The cases of both Peter Jackson and Jack Johnson demonstrate the many social and political conflicts that are allowed to "play out" within the boxing arena. Both fighters struggled to define themselves as champions within a system that resisted interracial matches, as evidenced by the widespread racial violence that their interracial matches provoked. In the US context of the Reconstruction, Black boxers like Jackson and Johnson functioned as early models for Black resistance to white, patriarchal authority. They were also subject to the mythologies of brutality and savagery that helped to support a widespread ideology of white supremacy. Most important for this book, the integration of boxing in the last decades of the nineteenth century in the United States coincided with a rise in the representation of Black athletes, including Jackson and Johnson, across all media. We see the bodies of these athletes across the fine arts, in the photographs of Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904) and the paintings of George Bellows. Boxers appear on postcards, tobacco advertisements, and on the covers of newspapers.

A major question for this study is how images of Black boxers in this period shape the social position of Black men in contemporary American culture at large via their simultaneous articulation and critique of stereotypes, and in specific relation to white masculinity. But to do this we must go back to the nineteenth century—a moment of profound transformation for masculine identities. According to the historian E. Anthony Rotundo, in this era: "Bourgeois manhood embraced new virtues and new obsessions. The male body moved to the center of men's gender concerns; manly passions were revalued in a favorable light; men began to look at the 'primitive' sources of manhood with new regard; the martial values attracted admiration; and competitive impulses were transformed into male virtues."[55] In answering these questions, we must first consider the role that athleticism played in defining a hegemonic masculine ideal that was unapologetically white.

IN THE LATE VICTORIAN ERA, participation in sports activities, particularly blood and gambling sports, were a mark of manliness in an era of sharp divisions along gender lines (in work, in family, and in leisure activities). The closing of the Western frontier in 1890—a stalwart symbol of freedom and possibility—and the subsequent turn toward industrialization led to a transformation of the relationship between men and labor.[56] The restless pioneer declined at the same time as the small farmer and other self-employed workers, meaning

that men were no longer as autonomous as they once were. In 1883 the American economist Henry George wrote that machines rendered the working man dependent, "depriving him of skills and of opportunities . . . ; lessening his control over his own condition and his hope of improving it; cramping his mind, and in many cases distorting and enervating his body."[57] Citing the preponderance of linguistic references to labor in descriptions of the ring, cultural historian Elliott J. Gorn has even gone so far as to argue that boxing provided a type of surrogate workplace for both fighters and spectators. "Boxing," he writes, "was 'a profession,' and pugilists were 'trained' in various 'schools' of fighting. Newspaper reports regularly used such phrases as 'they went to work,' or 'he did good work,' in their round-by-round coverage."[58] Despite the rapid erosion of skilled labor that followed industrialization, prize fighters were able to retain a sense of craftsmanship as well as their autonomy. We might consider the training regimens, the regulations, and even the vocabulary associated with boxing as indicators of its role in reviving the culture and language of skilled artisans.

The growth of bureaucratized corporate capitalism and consumer culture during the industrial age also provided working men with unstructured free time. As shifting labor conditions transformed the old apprenticeship system into one based on wage workers, individuals experienced a sharp distinction between work and leisure hours. Moreover, as the professional opportunities for middle-class men narrowed, the opportunities for commercial leisure increased. This was a change from earlier in the century, when work and family formed the center of middle-class identity. Rising industrialization produced fear among those who believed a move to the factory would undoubtedly produce lazy, even slothful, citizens. Social critics at the time pointed to an increase in cases of neurasthenia, a new psychological disorder first identified as early as 1829 but made famous by the neurologist George Miller Beard, who reintroduced the concept in 1869.[59] Neurasthenia, an affliction to which both men and women were thought to be vulnerable, caused a mechanical weakness of the nerves that could also lead to symptoms such as dizziness, faintness, headaches, and heart palpitations. Beard located the cause in the stresses of modern civilization: "steam power, the periodical press, the telegraph, the sciences, and the mental activity of women" were all to blame.[60] Many believed Americans to be particularly prone to the condition. Beard and his contemporaries specifically recommended that male, urban professionals afflicted by neurasthenia turn to sports—running, weightlifting, and boxing—to combat its effects. The frequency with which one finds advertisements for neurasthenic treatments alongside reports of boxing matches in periodicals such as the *National Police Gazette* attests to the explicit connections late nineteenth-century audiences made be-

tween the sport and health. To counteract the threat of these new urban pathologies, many turned to physical exercise.[61]

Class issues in the Gilded Age had a deep impact on men's bodies, their identities, and their access to power in this period. Manhood was crucial to middle-class identity—a way to assert authority over women as well as over the lower classes in a paternalistic fashion. With the influx of lower-class and immigrant labor—both in the workplace and in the political arena with increasingly violent labor movements—middle-class men suffered from a sudden loss of authority and agency. "Middle-class men," historian Gail Bederman writes, "worried that they were losing control of the country. The power of manhood, as the middle class understood it, encompassed the power to wield civic authority, to control strife and unrest, and to shape the future of the nation."[62] The protests of working-class and immigrant men, which threatened the authority of US-born, Anglo middle-class men, led to an increased focus on white manhood as a site of power. More specifically, new immigrant populations feeding into the United States, starting in the nineteenth century, created a need for the construction of whiteness as a distinct racial identity. White men sought to develop further justification for their authority and power within public culture through the conscious association of immigrant bodies with depravity, stupidity, and sloth.[63]

Free Blacks in these urban centers presented another problem, further requiring white working-class men to assert some privilege or distinction from emancipated Black men. As I will discuss in chapter 4 of this book, the sport of boxing was from its origin immersed within these debates around immigrants, Black men, and their status within the newly urban cultures of places like New York, Boston, and Philadelphia in this period. Although initially burdened with negative associations due to its popularity within immigrant populations, boxing transformed in the latter decades of the nineteenth century into a white, middle-class, gentlemanly pursuit.[64] Boxing and prizefighting, too—long associated with the working class—fascinated middle- and upper-class men. Amateur sparring became popular and respectable enough for even YMCAs to offer instruction. By the time Jack Johnson emerged as the world heavyweight champion in 1910, many middle-class men had come to accept athletes like Jim Jeffries (his opponent) as embodiments of their own sense of manhood.[65]

The popularity of boxing in this period immediately connected to wider concerns around the conditions of manhood. Sport and exercise were broadly touted as the ideal way to promote good health and good morals among the new white middle classes. Athleticism was promoted in the mid-nineteenth century as a way to teach young people values (including respect for author-

ity) and to "toughen up" a populace unfamiliar with hard labor.[66] As historian Michael Kimmel has claimed in his study of masculinity in the American context, in the late nineteenth century, middle-class men relied on boxing—long associated with the lower classes—to express masculine prowess and to define a hegemonic notion of masculinity in a time of turmoil. In this moment, manhood (previously thought to be an inner experience) was refocused outward, in the physical formation of a sturdy and muscular frame. "By the 1870s," Kimmel argues, "the idea of 'inner strength' [popularized in previous decades] was replaced by a doctrine of physicality and the body."[67] To combat perceived increases in "weakness," men worked overtime to masculinize society—recruiting male teachers, ridiculing women's suffrage, and even adopting a new vocabulary (i.e., "sissy," "pussy foot"). Some men began to appropriate activities previously assigned to the lower classes—a "rough, working-class masculinity" that "celebrated institutions and values antithetical to middle-class Victorian manliness—institutions like saloons, music halls, and prizefights; values like physical prowess, pugnacity, and sexuality."[68] In the American context, then, sport and athleticism were directly linked to the white (masculine) body politic. Bare-knuckle prizefighting emerged in a context wherein masculine identity was still under construction.

Sports began to take on political value as well. For example, in 1893 Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed that "manly out-of-door sports" would be instrumental in the revitalization of commercial America, as well as in the formation of an Anglo-Saxon super race. He prescribed outdoor sports and exercise (e.g., game hunting, boxing, and football) as the remedy to the effeminate and luxurious lifestyle that had left many men unfit and unprepared for war.[69] In this period, athletics were both sanctioned and financed by the federal government. Experts in recreational sports convinced the nation that exercising, boxing, and playing football and baseball would ensure the continued virility of young American men.[70] Many of these men, the first in recent memory to lack experience in direct combat, questioned their own military fitness compared with the generation that preceded them. Participation in sports provided a method to prove one's readiness to defend and protect the new, increasingly imperialistic nation.

Boxing gave meaning, and perhaps even order, to the daily violence experienced by those living in urban America at the turn of the twentieth century. Residents in overcrowded cities without modern sanitation faced staggering levels of disease, violence, death, and overall despair. "Boxers," writes the sports historian Elliot Gorn, "like fighting cocks and trained bulldogs, made bloodshed comprehensible and thus offered models of honorable conduct. They

taught men to face danger with courage, to be impervious to pain, and to return violence rather than passively accept it."[71] Fighters responded to a violent world with violence. Within this new context of industrial wealth, men obsessed over their own "over-civilization." Away from the workplace, where their power and authority seemed to diminish at an alarming rate, these men found alternative sources of esteem. Many viewed pronounced physical strength as symbolic of power in the larger social sphere. Violent sports provided the possibility for men of the elite classes to enjoy the material comforts of their success while simultaneously demonstrating that they did not lack any of the masculine attributes of the pioneers or soldiers who had come before them.[72] Prizefighting allowed for the expression of brutal force and masculine power that many explicitly valued. It provided the opportunity for men to indulge their taste for violence.[73] By the end of the nineteenth century, white middle-class American men were obsessed with health and athletics, as they sought to form muscled physiques that would communicate their inner virility and hopefully reclaim some of the social or personal power lost through an increase in sheer physical strength.

The shaping of masculinity was a critical project in the nineteenth century, one rooted in social experience but with tangible political and personal effects. Outward, physical markers of masculinity (e.g., a highly muscled body) were promoted as the antidote to fears of feminization. The gym became a place for men to transform their listless, feminized bodies into manly physiques, to display their physical strength as evidence of their masculine power. A precursor to what we may recognize now as bodybuilding, physical culture explicitly responded to a pressing need to express masculine power (and thus reestablish hegemonic masculinity). Suddenly, according to Kimmel, "the body did not *contain* the man within; that body *was* the man."[74]

Wrestling and "strongman acts" grew in popularity during this period, the latter moving from the circus to the music hall.[75] The rising physical culture stars—George Hackenschmidt (1877–1968), Bernarr Macfadden (1868–1955), Eugen Sandow (1867–1925), and Charles Atlas (1892–1972)—promoted the benefits of repeated, sustained isometric exercise through books, magazines, and other, more theatrical, means such as vaudeville performances and staged wrestling matches. These men used their own bodies as primary examples of "fitness," promoting a specific regimen of diet and exercise that they argued could shape the male body into an ideal representation of masculine authority and control. Most active in the last decade of the nineteenth century, Sandow, for example, reportedly modeled his body on Greek statuary and created a series of photographs and performances well into the twentieth century that

demonstrated the perfection of his own body.[76] These men were living examples of the masculine ideal, repeating and reiterating gender norms for wide audiences in text, image, and performance.

A renowned wrestler in Europe, the Estonian-born Hackenschmidt published his book *The Way to Live in Health and Physical Fitness* in 1908. Divided into two sections, the book includes a training manual, followed by Hackenschmidt's autobiography. In the text he argues for physical culture as the antidote to industrialization and urbanization: "It is a well-known fact that the majority of men today are relatively weak, whereas the struggle for existence demands now more than any previous epoch that we should all be strong!"[77] Throughout the book, Hackenschmidt uses his own body as the example of physical achievement. In one plate (fig. I.3) he stands in dark wrestling trunks that seem to dissolve into the dark background and highlight the contours of his white, muscled physique. He appears in a pose that current bodybuilding competitors would recognize as the "front relaxed pose." His feet press firmly against the floor to emphasize the upper-quadricep muscles of the leg, while flexing of the latissimus dorsi (or lats) of the upper body causes the arms to lift slightly upward. Here we are meant to marvel at the body that Hackenschmidt has achieved, noting every flexion and contour. In a radical departure from the ideal physique of the 1860s (a thin, wiry frame), by the end of the nineteenth century bulk and prominent muscles defined the ideal body. The explicit message here focuses on the ideal physical form of the masculine body—a body actively under construction. The visual rhetoric of the boxer in this period was imbricated in the discourses of corporeal masculinity and its intersections with the ideals of whiteness.

This new emphasis on the appearance of the male body carried consequences for thinking about masculinity—that is, as something constructed via representation or outward physical qualities, rather than generated from within. This new physical obsession included specific recommendations about diet, hydration strategies, bloodletting, and even sexual behavior.[78] As with the physical culture athletes, images of boxers appeared in newspapers, magazines, and books; they circulated on cabinet cards, postcards, and tobacco cards collected by fans.

Race played a key role in the fashioning of manhood in this period, as many of these ideas about social authority operated by drawing correspondences between male power and white supremacy.[79] Like manhood, these ideas about race drew on established ideological links between the body, individual identity, and power. To some extent, manhood had long been associated with white

I.3

George Hackenschmidt, ca. 1905. Rotary Photographic Co. LTD., London

supremacy. For example, the architects of state constitutions in more than a dozen northern and western US states placed Black men in the same category as women, as "dependents." The widely accepted notion that Black men, unlike their white counterparts, were not quite men helped to justify their exclusion from political and social life. Images of heroic white men among the "savage" tribes of Africa in popular magazines such as *National Geographic* visualized the attendant discourse of civilization.[80]

The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition serves as yet another example of the impulse to connect white supremacy to a sense of manhood. The fair itself was divided into two racially specific areas: the White City—a collection of seven white beaux-arts buildings—symbolized all the progress of white civilization, while the Midway Plaisance represented the undeveloped primitive nature of the dark races. Each of the seven buildings in the White City focused on a single aspect of the masculine world of commerce—manufacturing, agriculture, and so on—and, by extension, to the celebration of the power of white manhood. This explicit connection between whiteness and manhood was apparent to contemporary viewers; in one edition of the *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean,* poets described it as "A Vision of Strong Manhood and Perfection of Society."[81] Such explicit efforts to confirm the supremacy of whiteness connected to the politics of Jim Crow. The subordination of Black bodies during the period after slavery was integral to the maintenance of a national order that privileged whiteness, and this included the transformation of Blackness from a racial designation based on status (e.g., as slave versus free) to one based on accepted notions of cultural and/or biological difference. As Black bodies and white bodies came into closer contact in the late nineteenth century, a need to further underscore the superiority of whiteness and to do so by further separating it from Blackness also emerged. The heavyweight boxer, whose physical form had already been identified in the earlier Victorian period as the perfect example of manhood, was a particular point of fascination.

Any history of boxing in the United States must also by pure definition be a history of Blackness as well. The first boxers in the United States were slaves, who fought one another (sometimes while wearing iron collars) for the amusement of their plantation owners. After Emancipation, boxing had a unique status among other sports because it was desegregated. In the boxing ring, the widespread racial tensions during Reconstruction often played out between white and Black opponents. For Black men, sports provided one of the few available paths toward financial (and thereby social and political) autonomy within this context. Excluded from the wider labor markets in the urban North, many Black men turned to boxing, for example, to generate income. As the his-

torian Paul R. D. Lawrie explains, "boxing—despite its brutality, meager purses, and illegality—provided a rare chance for working men across the color line to acquire a modicum of financial autonomy outside traditional labor markets."[82] Promoters of these integrated matches capitalized on the racism in American society, with audiences ready to witness the brutality of the sport. The Black body, once again, was placed in a precarious position for limited financial gains. But these early audiences also got something they did not bargain for—a victory for a Black fighter would also signify a challenge to white supremacy.

Perhaps recognizing the threat of a Black fighter's victory, the white heavyweight champion of the 1880s, John L. Sullivan, discussed above, famously refused to fight Black opponents, arguing that he did not want to "sully the white race."[83] A decade later, when the Black featherweight champion George Dixon fought the white amateur champion Jack Skelly in New Orleans in 1892, the crowd was disturbed by what it saw. Dixon controlled the fight from the start, even breaking Skelly's nose before knocking him out completely in the eighth round. According to one report, "white fans winced every time Dixon landed on Skelly. The sight was repugnant to some men from the South. A darky is alright in his place here, but the idea of sitting quietly by and seeing a colored boy pommel a white lad grates on southerners."[84] To appease the irritated white audience, the fight's venue, the Olympia Club, banned any further mixed-race matches. The anxiety around Black fighters in the ring with white opponents is perhaps best expressed by Charles A. Dana, the editor of the *New York Sun*, who wrote an impassioned plea in 1895:

> We are in the midst of a growing menace. The black man is rapidly forging to the front ranks of athletics, especially in the field of fisticuffs. We are in the midst of a black rise against white supremacy. . . . If the negro is capable of developing such prowess in those divisions of boxing, what is going to stop him from making the same progress in the heavier ranks?[85]

The threat of a Black boxer in the ring exceeded that of his opponent; this was an open challenge to the social order.

The menace of the Black boxer was perhaps most evident in the match between Jim Jeffries and Jack Johnson in Reno, Nevada, in 1910—a match that concludes this volume and the first public, mixed-race, heavyweight title fight in the United States. Promoters and the media advertised the fight as the "Battle of the Century." Popular illustrations from the era consistently portrayed Johnson in the visual trope of the Sambo—a caricature of the uneducated rural slave made popular in minstrel performances. Take, for example, a cartoon from the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 1910, titled "Chicken versus the Championship,"

I.4

LeRoy Robert Ripley, "Chicken versus the Championship,"
San Francisco Chronicle, June 14, 1910.

which extrapolates and exaggerates the well-worn stereotype of Black people's love for fried chicken (fig. I.4). Johnson appears twice in the multi-paneled cartoon. In the left of the composition, he is shown seated at a table; a plate in front of him holds a towering pile of food. He wears a checkered coat with a large napkin tied around his neck as a bib, and in his right, white-gloved hand he holds a fork on which a large drumstick is impaled. Johnson's head has been depicted with his forehead flattened and his cheeks exaggerated to appear rounder. The dark crosshatching of the skin appears even blacker when viewed in contrast to the sharp white of Johnson's bulging eyes and the distorted, wide mouth with bulging lips that stretches impossibly across his face. A tongue protrudes from the mouth, and as we follow the arc of its curvature upward to the left cheek we read a speech bubble containing Johnson's warning to the waiter who appears directly opposite his figure: "If Ah'm asleep—fo' lor' sake don't wake me! Sling another squawker." In addition to the racism in both image (the Sambo) and text (via the exaggerated diction) we have the insinuation of Johnson's insatiable appetite. In this image, Johnson's athletic prowess—in the five years before his match against Jeffries in July 1910 Johnson had lost only one of twenty-nine bouts—is diminished as he is transformed into a caricature. As he smiles and licks his lips, his perceived threat to white supremacy is reduced, and the audience presumably laughs along with this ridiculous scene.

Heavyweight considers the presence of these men across media and, more specifically, how visual culture reinforced the corporeal and patriarchal definitions of white masculinity that persist into our present moment. We will see throughout this book how representation—in both fine art and popular media—expressed and managed the threat of Blackness. While race, as an ideological construction rather than a biological reality, organizes nearly every aspect of our social lives, it depends almost entirely on visual perception. *Heavyweight* relies on scholarship from within visual culture studies, which has in recent decades turned its attention toward the dialectical relationship between representation and Blackness. Photography, in particular, has been a ripe subject for scholars in this vein as the history of the medium is so closely connected to the regulation of difference (often under the guise of empiricism). As the artist and cultural critic Coco Fusco, explains, "Rather than *recording* the existence of race, photography *produced* race as a visualizable fact."[86] This happened through the direct manipulation of bodies within the frame (pose, gesture) as well as through the persistent rhetoric of photography as a scientific medium. The photograph itself was a mode of information and, in the words of Leigh Raiford, "a way of seeing, a visual means of relaying fact and imposing order."[87] While the assertion (and the consequences) of the photograph as an

index of reality will be further explored in chapter 2, I want to highlight here the work that scholars like Raiford, alongside Tina Campt, Saidiya Hartman, Eric Lott, Shawn Michelle Smith, Deborah Willis and many others have done to investigate the "truth claims" of these images as well as their role in histories that marginalize Black life. They have asked us to look again at family portraits, news photographs, and even mug shots to find humanity and joy, where previously we saw only tragedy and horror, to consider the historical roots of the stereotypes of Blackness that circulate in our contemporary world, and to chart the visual dimension of race and its intersections with the photographic medium.[88] All this research argues for a closer consideration of vernacular culture, of work that typically escapes the archive, as a way to explore the violence, the terror, and the pleasure of Black life in nineteenth-century America. *Heavyweight* builds on the work of these scholars and is similarly invested in unpacking the role of the image in constructions of Blackness, both historically and contemporarily. But while the scholars noted above have produced landmark studies of lynching, portraiture, minstrelsy, and even the fine arts of the late nineteenth century, they have also largely ignored popular representations of the Black boxer. I am invested throughout this book in the concept of the "shadow archive," first theorized by Allan Sekula. According to Sekula, it is not enough to consider a single, perhaps well-known photograph or image; we must also consider that image in relation to all others to find meaning. The shadow archive includes the entire social field of representation—both fine art and vernacular, public and private.[89] With this book I argue that images of these men, circulated in both fine art and popular media, are critical to our understanding of the ways Black masculinity has been shaped, policed, fetishized, and even made abject over the last 150 years.

HEAVYWEIGHT FOCUSES ON images made in the United States between 1880 and 1910—dates chosen for their significance within the history of Jim Crow, the rise of print culture, and the history of interracial boxing. Each chapter centers on a single Black boxer in order to explore the visual rhetoric of Black masculinity across a range of media that includes print illustration, photography, and painting. The first chapter provides an overview of the sport of boxing in the United States, its place within the critical project of white manhood in the nineteenth century, and its intersections with an increased focus on the physical body as the site of masculinity. I deal here with the circulation of images in popular illustrated print media, including the sporting paper the *National*

Police Gazette—a model for the monetization of visual culture and the cult of celebrity that still operates today.

The second chapter looks closely at the photographs taken by Eadweard Muybridge of the mixed-race boxer Ben Bailey in 1885 as a historically situated racial project wherein the social categorization of Black people played out. I argue that these pictures of Bailey must be read within the larger context of nineteenth-century photography, in which the bourgeois classes were excessively preoccupied with the classification of difference, and looked to the medium, with its strong associations of "truth," for evidence to support a general drive to regulate, even criminalize, the presence of an unwanted underclass in the new urban environment. I am particularly interested here in the introduction of the anthropometric grid in these photographs, which uniquely pathologizes Bailey. Muybridge's presentation of this body, and its translation of Bailey's dynamic movement into a series of discrete and identifiable poses, rehearses an attempt to fix and constrain the Black body within the photographic frame. I further explore how these photographs gave visual form to these fantasies (and fears) about Black bodies in the public sphere, looking both to fine art and vernacular photography for comparative treatments of the Black body as both a scientific and an aesthetic object.

Chapter 3 centers on the Australian heavyweight boxer Peter Jackson, known as "the Black Prince," and a series of nude photographs taken of him in San Francisco in 1889. Unlike chapter 2, which investigates a unique photographic project with a limited audience, my concern here is how Jackson's body features as part of a much wider and international visual program that classicized, sexualized, and eroticized the Black body in order to manage its threat to the white public after the Civil War. I will also explore the connections between Jackson's body and the fin de siècle development of a new "physical culture," which promoted the development (and strengthening) of the physical body, through comparisons with the nude photographs taken in 1889 with images of bodybuilder Eugen Sandow from the same period. A major aim of this chapter is to explore how the body of the Black heavyweight boxer—perhaps the most threatening of them all—was consciously and consistently shaped by discourses of sexuality, and how the erotic and the violent became entangled through representation.

The fourth chapter centers on the painting *Both Members of This Club* (1909) by the Ashcan School artist George Bellows. While this image has been explicitly discussed in terms of its interactions with rhetorics of manhood (or even Bellows's progressive idealism), such analyses remain largely white, middle-class, and heterosexual. The integration of boxing in the first decade of

the twentieth century certainly brought issues of race into the public arena, and my goal here is to do the same for Bellows's work. In this chapter see how the widespread racial tensions following Emancipation and Reconstruction played out between white and Black opponents, and within the fine arts, exploring how the visual culture of this period (including the work of Bellows) played a critical role in fomenting and even justifying racial violence.

Although most histories of boxing tend to emphasize the physical violence of the encounter between two bodies, this book instead tells a visual history of the sport, framing it as an ideological apparatus through which whiteness establishes the violent mythology of its supremacy. I argue that boxing in the nineteenth century normalized a culture of anti-Black violence that persists in our present moment. *Heavyweight* locates a new origin of anti-Blackness stereotypes, reclaiming a history of Black heavyweight fighters whose images circulated widely and internationally. In the reconstruction period and after, these images exceeded reportage and became the primary means by which the white public positioned Black men as opponents. I argue that we can find lurking in these images the blueprint for our conceptions of the Black male body as existing somewhere between fear and fantasy, simultaneously an object of desire and an instrument of brutal violence.

Notes

PREFACE

1. Tony Pipitone, "Myths, Misstatements Surround Trayvon Martin's Death," *Click Orlando*, June 5, 2013, https://www.clickorlando.com/news/2013/06/05/myths-misstatements-surround-trayvon-martins-death/.

2. Marcus Christenson, "Euro 2012: Mario Balotelli Threatens to 'Kill' Banana-Throwing Fans," *Guardian*, May 30, 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/football/2012/may/30/euro-2012-mario-balotelli-italy.

3. See Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*.

4. James was only the third man (and the first Black man) to appear on the cover at the time.

5. See "Critics Go Ape over Lebron James Magazine Cover," Sportsfilter (weblog), March 27, 2008, https://sportsfilter.com/news/9733/critics-go-ape-over-lebron-james-magazine.

6. Steve Wyche, "Colin Kaepernick Explains Why He Sat During National Anthem," *NFL News*, August 27, 2016, https://www.nfl.com/news/colin-kaepernick-explains-why-he-sat-during-national-anthem-0ap3000000691077. Kaepernick's protests escalated the next week, when he decided to kneel during the anthem—a modification he made after a conversation with former Seahawks player and Green Beret Nate Boyer, who had written an open letter to Kaepernick suggesting a kneeling posture was a way to "show respect." Nate Boyer, "An Open Letter to Colin Kaepernick, from a Green Beret Turned Long-Snapper," *Army Times*, August 30, 2016, https://www.armytimes.com/opinion/2016/08/30/an-open-letter-to-colin-kaepernick-from-a-green-beret-turned-long-snapper/.

7. See Ben Jacobs, "Kim Jong-un, the NFL and 'Screaming at Senators,'" *Guardian*, September 23, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/sep/23/kim-jong-un-the-nfl-and-screaming-at-senators-donald-trumps-strange-night-in-alabama.

8. Bryan Armen Graham, "Donald Trump Blasts NFL Anthem Protesters: 'Get That Son of a Bitch off the Field,'" *Guardian*, September 23, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2017/sep/22/donald-trump-nfl-national-anthem-protests.

9. Leonard and King, "Celebrities, Commodities, and Criminals," 3.

10. Hall, *Representation and the Media*.

INTRODUCTION

1. The 1965 match between Ali and Liston was a fight for the World Boxing Council (WBC) heavyweight championship. The WBC is one of four major organizations that sanctions professional boxing; the others are the World Boxing Association (WBA), the International Boxing Federation (IBF), and the World Boxing Organization (WBO). Ali won both the WBC and WBA heavyweight titles in 1964, but as explained below, his 1965 match was sanctioned only by the WBC. Wherever possible, birth and death dates for prizefighters are given at their first mention in each chapter.

2. See "1965 Photo Contest, Sports, 1st Prize," World Press Photo, https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo-contest/1965/john-rooney/1. Nearly fifty years later, readers of *Sports Illustrated* voted a similar image, taken by photographer Neil Leifer, as one of the hundred greatest sports photos of all time. A second image of Ali also appeared on the *Sports Illustrated* list—from the November 1966 match against Cleveland "Big Cat" Williams. "100 Greatest Sports Photos of All Time," *Sports Illustrated,* December 17, 2012, https://www.si.com/more-sports/2012/12/17/100-greatest-sports-photos-all-time-final.

3. See also Fleetwood, *On Racial Icons*; Hariman and Lucaites, *No Caption Needed*.

4. Rooney's use of the 35 mm SLR camera indeed creates a rectangular composition, as opposed to the square image produced by Neil Leifer's Rolleiflex camera.

5. Robert Lipsyte, "Muhammad Ali Dies at 74: Titan of Boxing and the 20th Century," *New York Times*, June 4, 2016.

6. Bass, "State of the Field," 150.

7. Brooks and Blackman, "African Americans," 442.

8. For further discussion of the complex debates around the primacy of race in sports studies and its critics, see Davis, "New Directions," 17–18.

9. Davis, "New Directions," 184.

10. Bass, "State of the Field," 148–72; Carrington and MacDonald, *"Race," Sport and British Society*; Leonard, "Real Color of Money," 158–79.

11. See also Ferber, "Construction of Black Masculinity," 11–24. I have also benefited greatly from the works of Mike O'Mahony and Lynda Nead. See, e.g., Nead, "Stilling the Punch"; O'Mahony, "Art and Artifice."

12. Liston was arrested on March 10, 1964, in Denver for speeding (76 miles per hour in a 30-mph zone). The patrolman reported that Liston had no valid license and was in possession of a .22-caliber revolver. "Liston Draws Fine of $600 on Weapon, Driving Charge," *New York Times*, May 30, 1964.

13. Although biographers of Ali typically refer to him by the name Cassius Clay when describing events prior to his announcement of his Muslim name in March 1964, I have chosen here to call him by the name given to him by Elijah Muhammad throughout this text.

14. See Kindred, *Sound and Fury*, 38.

15. This is an excerpt of a poem written by Ali in 1960 on the flight home from the Olympics in Rome. See Maraniss, *Rome 1960*, 352.

16. In interviews Ali claimed that the model for his provocative behavior inside and outside the ring was the professional wrestler "Gorgeous George" Wagner. See John Burrows, dir., *Parkinson*, season 1, episode 14, BBC, 1971.

17. Chris Johnston, "Muhammad Ali's Greatest Quotes," *Guardian*, June 4, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/jun/04/muhammad-ali-greatest-quotes-sting-butterfly-louisville-lip.

18. Roberts, *Joe Louis*, 51, emphasis added.

19. Johnson became champion in 1908 (with a fight against the Canadian fighter Tommy Burns) and held the title until 1915, when he was defeated by Jess Willard. Between 1915 and 1937 no heavyweight title fights were held between Black and white fighters. This changed in 1937 with the Black boxer Joe Louis's defeat of James Braddock on June 22. The first heavyweight title fight between two Black boxers did not happen until December 5, 1947, when Joe Walcott unsuccessfully challenged Louis. Title fights between two Black boxers became increasingly common in the second half of the twentieth century.

20. Arthur Daley, "Boy on a Man's Errand," *New York Times*, February 23, 1964.

21. Larry Merchant, "Sonny: Boy!!" *Philadelphia Daily News*, September 26, 1962.

22. Liston failed to return to the ring after the end of the sixth round.

23. Robert Lipsyte, "Clay Discusses His Future, Liston, and Black Muslims," *New York Times*, February 27, 1964.

24. Ali would get into a much more public fight with Ernie Terrell in the lead up to their match on February 6, 1967, for the WBA and WBC heavyweight championship, when Terrell repeatedly refused to call Ali by his Muslim name. Over fifteen punishing rounds, Ali famously taunted Terrell in the ring, asking him after several punches, "What's my name?"

25. Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 166. Mercer is discussing here a work by the artist Keith Piper, which takes the Ali-Patterson match of 1965 as its subject.

26. Jimmy Cannon, cited in Remnick, *King of the World*, 120. This is a reference to two boxing matches between the American Joe Louis (a.k.a. "the Brown Bomber") and the German Max Schmeling in 1936 and 1938. Positioning each fighter as a national representative—that is, Louis for the United States and Schmeling for Nazi Germany—the bouts came to symbolize the fight between democracy and fascism during the period leading up to World War II.

27. Eig, *Ali*, 220.

28. Ali very publicly refused induction on April 28, 1967, citing religious reasons. Almost immediately—before the official conviction of draft evasion—he was stripped of his WBA heavyweight champion title.

29. Walker introduces this term in a discussion about his own personal experience of multiculturalism, which he describes as "the sound of a door closing rather than opening." See Walker, "Renigged," 16–17.

30. See also hooks, "Representing the Black Male Body," 206–7. hooks discusses the hypermasculine image of the Black boxer in particular, using the examples of Jack Johnson in the early twentieth century and Joe Louis during the interwar period.

31. See Mitchell, *Seeing through Race*, 41.

32. Berger, *Man Made*, 1, emphasis in original.

33. Doezema, *George Bellows and Urban America*.

34. Mercer, "Endangered Species," 75.

35. hooks, "Representing the Black Male Body," 202.

36. Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," 3.

37. Du Bois first used this term in "The Strivings of the Negro People," published in *Atlantic Monthly* in August 1897.

38. Mitchell, *Seeing through Race*, 43.

39. In using the term *spectator*, I am referring simultaneously to a member of the viewing audience (or in this case a boxing match), as well as to the connections of this viewing experience to feelings of pleasure.

40. Benjamin, "Work of Art," 114.

41. Oates, *On Boxing*, 32.

42. Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 5.

43. While this book is primarily focused on the United States, the sport of boxing in the late nineteenth century was indeed an Anglo-American phenomenon. For more on the sport within the United Kingdom and its territories, see Pointon, "Pugilism, Painters and National Identity"; Hyde, "Noble Art." Sports historians have explored the specific connection between the sport and the rise of imperialism in this period. See Stoddart, "Sport, Cultural Imperialism, and Colonial Response."

44. Ward, *Unforgivable Blackness*, 121.

45. "Sporting Notions," *Bulletin*, December 31, 1908, 28.

46. Jack Johnson, quoted in Ward, *Unforgivable Blackness*, 111.

47. Ward, *Unforgivable Blackness*, 114.

48. "Sporting Notions," *Bulletin*, December 31, 1908, 28. In the same issue, a poem entitled "Our Colored Brethren" succinctly made an argument for the segregation of Asians as a natural condition, claiming:

> they're nicely isolated in their islands overseas.
> And, as God has segregated
> Them with care from you and me,
> Let us keep them as they're rated
> By Eternity's decree.

49. According to Johnson's own reports, such epithets and taunts were repeated inside the ring by his opponent as well, writing "If I had killed Burns for the language he used to me I would have been fully justified." Johnson, cited in Ward, *Unforgivable Blackness*, 123.

50. The fight took place in Sydney on September 25, 1886.

51. "Sullivan Makes a Speech," *San Francisco Examiner*, June 1, 1891, cited in Petersen, *Peter Jackson*, 151.

52. See chapter 1 for a more detailed history of this publication.

53. John L. Sullivan, "Jolts from John L.," *San Francisco Sunday Call*, May 28, 1905, 7.

54. Fitzpatrick, quoted in Hornibrook, *Lure of the Ring*.

55. Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 222.

56. White, *First Sexual Revolution*, 9.

57. Henry George, cited in Trachtenberg, *Incorporation of America*, 43.

58. Gorn, *Manly Art*, 137–38.

59. Beard, "Neurasthenia," 217–21.

60. Lutz, *American Nervousness*, 6.

61. Reiss, "Sport."

62. Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 14.

63. See also Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*. I note, however, that Roediger does not consider the role of sports in the ideological project of whiteness at the end of the nineteenth century.

64. For example, the introduction of Queensbury rules, which required a standardized boxing ring along with timed, specific intervals for rounds within the match, was one step toward legitimizing the sport for the white middle class.

65. Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 17.

66. Zirin, *People's History*, 18.

67. Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 120.

68. Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 17.

69. Theodore Roosevelt, "The Value of Athletic Training," *Harper's Weekly*, December 23, 1893, cited in Reiss, "Sport," 186. For other essays by Roosevelt on this topic, see "Professionalism in American Sports," *North American Review* 151 (1890): 187; and Roosevelt, "American Boy." Roosevelt was also a vocal fan of boxing; he fought with gloves in college at Harvard, and when serving as the twenty-sixth president of the United States he even visited Jim Jeffries's training camp as he prepared to fight Jack Johnson. See Gorn, *Manly Art*, 197.

70. Gorn and Goldstein, *Brief History*, 178–79.

71. Gorn, *Manly Art*, 145.

72. Gorn, *Manly Art*, 189.

73. Gorn, "Meaning of Prizefighting," 227–28.

74. Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 103, emphasis in original.

75. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man*.

76. See chapter 3 for an extended examination of Sandow's images.

77. Hackenschmidt, *Way to Live*, 14.

78. A particularly fascinating and influential example is Kellogg, *Plain Facts*.

79. Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 20.

80. See also Susan Goldberg, "For Decades, Our Coverage Was Racist. To Rise Above Our Past, We Must Acknowledge It," *National Geographic*, March 12, 2018.

81. *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean,* April 26, 1893, supplement. Cited in Bederman, "'Civilization,' the Decline of Middle-Class Manliness, and Ida B. Wells's Antilynching Campaign (1892–94)," 10. The male emphasis of the exhibition was duly underscored by the exposition's exclusion of women in both its organization and its displays. In response to this exclusion, over one hundred prominent women, including Susan B. Anthony, petitioned Congress to appoint women to the exposition's governing commission. Denying their request, Congress instead established the patronizing "Board of Lady Managers." Despite the ridiculous name, this group of women organized the Women's Building,

a well-attended exhibit, inside the White City, and also attempted to post placards throughout the exposition to inform attendees about the role of women's labor. In reaction to the exclusion of African Americans from the Exposition, Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells distributed a pamphlet (in English, French, German, and Spanish) entitled *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition*.

82. Lawrie, *Forging a Laboring Race*, 1.

83. Gorn and Goldstein, *Brief History*, 113.

84. Ashe, *Hard Road to Glory*, 23, cited in Zirin, *People's History*, 28.

85. Cited in Zirin, *People's History*, 28–29.

86. Fusco, "Racial Times," 16, emphasis in original.

87. Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare*, 12.

88. Campt, *Listening to Images*; Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; Lott, *Love and Theft*; Smith, *American Archives*; Smith, *At the Edge of Sight*; Willis, *Picturing Us*.

89. Sekula, "Body and the Archive."

CHAPTER ONE. THE BARE-KNUCKLE BREED

1. Heenan and Sayers fought bare-knuckle, as was common practice at the time. Throughout this chapter I differentiate between "boxing" and "prizefighting" when describing historical events.

2. Whether individual fighters were able to profit off such merchandise remains unknown.

3. *Cartes de visite* were sold in multiples, for a dollar a dozen or a dime each. Broadway theaters began to sell them, and they quickly became a staple in advertising for productions. Popular figures could have several thousands of cards made of them based on one image. By 1861, *cartes de visite* had replaced daguerreotypes as the most widely available and sought-after portrait photography.

4. Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 8.

5. Burgos, *Playing America's Game*, 3.

6. Burgos, *Playing America's Game*, 4.

7. Burgos, *Playing America's Game,* 3, emphasis added.

8. Burgos, *Playing America's Game*, 3.

9. Hariman and Lucaites, *No Caption Needed*, 7. Thanks to Irene Cheng for pointing me to this reference.

10. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, xvii–xviii.

11. I am working from the example of David Roediger here in maintaining the language of race (rather than ethnicity) in relationships to new immigrants, which is more aligned with the past usage of the term. That is, "race" was a concept in industrializing America that applied to Black as well as European ethnic difference. See Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 31.

12. *Boston Gazette*, March 5, 1733, cited in Gorn, *Manly Art*, 36.

13. Moreau de St. Méry, *Moreau de St. Méry's American Journey*, 328–29, cited in Gorn, *Manly Art*, 37.

14. Obi, "Black Terror," 101.