“STRONG IN BODY, CLEAN IN MIND, LOFTY IN IDEALS”: ATHLETIC ABILITY IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY US WOMEN’S BASKETBALL

by

Stephanie Murphy

Copyright © Stephanie Murphy 2018

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the DEPARTMENT OF GENDER & WOMEN’S STUDIES

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements For the Degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In the Graduate College

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

2018
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
GRADUATE COLLEGE

As members of the Dissertation Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Stephanie Murphy, titled "Strong in Body, Clean in Mind, Lofty in Ideals": Athletic Ability in Early 20th Century US Women’s Basketball" and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dr. Miranda Joseph  
Date: April 30, 2018

Dr. Eithne Luibheid  
Date: April 30, 2018

Dr. Vincent J. Del Casino  
Date: April 30, 2018

Dr. Fiona I. B. Ngô  
Date: April 30, 2018

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copies of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

Dissertation Director: Dr. Miranda Joseph  
Date: April 30, 2018
STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

This dissertation has been submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of Arizona and is deposited in the University Library to be made available to borrowers under rules of the Library.

Brief quotations from this dissertation are allowable without special permission, provided that an accurate acknowledgement of the source is made. Requests for permission for extended quotation from or reproduction of this manuscript in whole or in part may be granted by the head of the major department of the Dean of the Graduate College when in his or her judgement the proposed use of the material is in the interests of scholarship. In all other instances, however, permission must be obtained from the author.

SIGNED: Stephanie Murphy
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... 7

CHAPTER 1
Athletic Ability, Racialized Gender, and the Biopolitics of Early Twentieth-Century US Women’s Basketball ........................................................................................................... 8
  Preface .................................................................................................................................. 8
  Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 12
  U.S. Progressive and Interwar Era Contexts ..................................................................... 17
  Emergence and Proliferation of Women’s Basketball ...................................................... 22
  Domination and Liberation in Sports Studies .................................................................. 26
  Athletic Ability in the Shadow of Ableism ...................................................................... 32
  The Biopolitics of Racialized Gender ............................................................................ 38
  Chapter Outline ................................................................................................................. 45
  Notes ................................................................................................................................. 51

CHAPTER 2
Pedagogies of Racialized Gender in Early Basketball Governance .................................. 58
  Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 58
  Origins and Popularization Meet Risk and Regulation ................................................. 63
  The Significance of Basketball for Women in 1901 ..................................................... 75
  The Significance of Basketball for Women Twenty Years Later .............................. 79
  Pedagogies of Racialized Gender and Athletic Ability .............................................. 87
  Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 92
  Notes ............................................................................................................................... 94

CHAPTER 3
Athletic Labor in Industrial and Barnstormer Basketball .................................................. 100
  Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 100
  Work and Leisure, Professionals and Amateurs ......................................................... 105
  The Rise of Industrial Women’s Athletics .................................................................... 114
  From Recreational Supplement to Commercial Competition .................................. 121
  Athletic Ability, Labor Power, and Historiographies of US Capitalism .................. 135
  Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 144
  Notes ............................................................................................................................... 147

CHAPTER 4
The Historical Geography of Chicago Women’s Basketball .............................................. 155
  Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 155
  Placing Basketball in Chicago .................................................................................... 161
  Community Building and Mass Participation ......................................................... 168
  Mass Spectatorship and Playing with/across Race and Sex .................................. 173
  Armories, Nightclubs, and Contiguous Zones ....................................................... 186
  Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 201
  Notes ............................................................................................................................. 203
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: “Goal” by Tom Thurlby……………………………………………………………58

Figure 2: All American Red Heads Promotional Poster……………………………………131

Figure 3: Helen Smith, “Giant Center” and “Latest Sensation”…………………………133

Figure 4: 1920s-1930s Women’s Basketball Venues by Type in Chicago’s Community Areas…………………………………………………………………………………………167

Figure 5: Community Center and Religion-Based Basketball Venues and Percentage of Foreign Born White Residents per 1930 Census Tract…………………………………….171

Figure 6: Community Center and Religion-Based Basketball Venues and Percentage of Black Residents per 1930 Census Tract…………………………………………………………173

Figure 7: Mass Spectatorship Venues and Percentage of Owned Homes per 1930 Census Tract……………………………………………………………………………………………175

Figure 8: Mass Spectatorship Venues and Percentage of Employed Men per 1930 Census Tract……………………………………………………………………………………………176

Figure 9: Mass Spectatorship Venues and Percentage of Employed Women per 1930 Census Tract……………………………………………………………………………………………177

Figure 10: Mass Spectatorship Venues and Percentage of Black Residents per 1930 Census Tract……………………………………………………………………………………………179

Figure 11: Taylor Trunks Team Picture…………………………………………………………183

Figure 12: Exterior View of the Broadway Armory…………………………………………187

Figure 13: Exterior View of the Eighth Regiment Armory…………………………………191

Figure 14: Roamer Girls Team Picture………………………………………………………194
ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the origins and popularization of women’s basketball in the early twentieth-century United States, from its invention in 1892 through the interwar years. Using interdisciplinary qualitative methods and archival research, it explores how women’s basketball was differentially situated in the realms of physical education, industrial labor, and urban cultural publics. It demonstrates how women’s athletic ability was articulated as socially valuable in each of these settings to argue that women’s basketball became a biopolitical technology triangulated by the politics of racism, sexism, and ableism. It further shows how women’s athletic ability became a site of cultural struggle over the politics of racialized gender in the early twentieth century and speculates what we might learn from this history as we encounter new biopolitical technologies in the early twenty-first century.
Chapter 1: Athletic Ability, Racialized Gender, and the Biopolitics of Early Twentieth-Century US Women’s Basketball

“Be strong in body, clean in mind, lofty in ideals”
-James Naismith

Preface

I came to this research topic by virtue of my own experience as an athlete. From youth through adulthood, I have been interpolated and self-identified as athletic and this has served me in many ways. At the risk of a tawdry list of accomplishments, my relationship with physical and athletic culture has taken me down a path that has included a black belt in Tae Kwon Do, a season of youth track and field and softball, a few years of soccer, some high school and college water polo, Gaelic football for the better part of a decade, and of course, basketball off and on from elementary school to most recently, a Tucson YMCA men’s rec league. I’ve played in yards, driveways, high school fields, gyms and pools, college tournaments, national and international events. I’ve formed fond memories of these experiences and they are inscribed on and in my body.

Sports have shaped my sense of self and my relationship with others; my experience helped me find my first friends, connect to my family, and relate to strangers. From a very young age, I received praise and recognition for my athletic abilities. That positive feedback instilled in me feelings of confidence and self-efficacy. I learned how to feel comfortable in my body, and learned, through discipline and habit, it was a body that did what I wanted and needed it to do. I learned I could be valued for tenacity and resolve. On teams, I learned trust, collective action, accountability, and leadership. I acquired a reputation, opportunities, and networks that could have otherwise been foreclosed to me. Mostly, I had fun. I felt awe in the uncanny things I saw and did, learned to appreciate pain and discomfort, took joy in winning and begrudgingly
acquired grace in defeat. Over the years, I grew to feel an inalienable power and knowledge flow through my own body. It was not until graduate school that I began to reflect on my own experiences of being an athlete and the privileges I enjoyed by virtue of not only being above average in able-bodiedness, in addition to also being mostly middle class, white, and masculine of center. I feel lucky that I had the access, resources and support to become an athlete.

I am not alone in this positive evaluation of the role and function sports, especially for female-bodied people. Youth and women’s sports platforms have been widely developed in local, regional, and global settings to further the goal of gender and racial equality, peace in conflict zones, global development.¹ For example, UN Assistant Secretary-General and UN Women Deputy Executive Director Lakshmi Puri has publically stated:

First, sport has huge potential to empower women and girls. In many countries, it has been recognized that sport can be a force to amplify women's voices and tear down gender barriers and discrimination. Women in sport defy the misperception that they are weak or incapable. Every time they clear a hurdle or kick a ball, demonstrating not only physical strength, but also leadership and strategic thinking, they take a step towards gender equality. Here is good evidence that participation in sports can help break-down gender stereotypes, improve girls’ and women’s self-esteem and contribute to the development of leadership.² 

Puri’s belief is founded on some good wisdom.³ In sharing my research with different communities, I consistently hear about grandmothers, mothers, daughters, granddaughters, and nieces who have benefitted from participation on sports teams. I, myself, hold the belief that the opportunity to play sports greatly enhanced my own feelings of bodily acceptance as well as overall mental and physical health. And I, too, would advocate for participation in sports as a
fount for psychic insulation and visceral pleasure in the face of an unequal world. Sports are encouraged for their empowering or progressive potential, and ultimately, for the social mobility they can offer to individuals and groups. Yet, this potential, promise, and positive association of sports relies on a belief and an investment in athletic ability and this investment in athletic ability is pervasive and visible across political spectrums, left, right, and center.

The logic of ability is deeply rooted in the episteme of Western modernity and we have yet to fully contend with the way it structures present and historical struggles for recognition and justice that have heretofore governed the legibility and legitimacy of what it means to be human. Athletic ability is one mode of expression of this more insidious logic and sports become vehicles for the dispersion of this logic. Investments in sports, and in athletic ability more specifically, can rely on and reproduce the notion that athletes are archetypal human subjects. In other words, athletes are humans par excellence. They inspire belief in progress and triumph and their athletic ability is invoked as manifestation, evidence, or proof of value. This proof arrives by way of the fact of capability, or both the capacity and ability for self-possession and self-determination. These concepts form the centerpiece of Western liberal humanist thought and being that justifies and reproduces hierarchy. While athletic accomplishments are rightly invoked as grounds for individual and group pride and the triumph of will, the idea that athletic excellence should prove the worth of a person or people is deeply troubling even as I recognize I benefitted from it.

The investment in athletic ability produces what Lauren Berlant has called, “cruel optimism,” or “when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially.” This is to say, our beliefs about athletic ability and the athletes that embody it are often generated by a desire for equality, freedom, human liberation but the
attachments we make to athletic ability are inherently delimited by Western epistemologies and ontologies of bodily difference. In fact, they betray more radical visions about the possibilities embedded in sports as physical culture outlets. Ultimately, this dissertation is guided by a desire to make this long standing cruel optimism more visible. In doing so, I wish to challenge the ways we make meaningful associations between bodily ability with social value and explore how the mechanisms that reproduce these associations might also disrupt them. In this dissertation, the story of early twentieth-century US women’s basketball provides the occasion to do so.\(^5\)

As evidenced in the epigraph by James Naismith, the inventor of basketball, sports offer quite a compelling mandate. That mandate is to reach higher and do better. In doing so, the mind, body, and spirit are conscripted in the service of progress. This mandate says that if you make your body strong, your mind clean, and your ideals lofty, you will succeed in life. But what becomes of the weak, the dirty, and the lowly? At heart, this project investigates what is at stake when we invest in the meaningful association of athletic ability with social value. Ability is a measure or index of human capacity; a capacity that while purportedly natural and biological is nonetheless a political and social status afforded under a particular ontological and epistemological regime of perceptibility and recognition. Ability, when adhered and cohered to hierarchies of value, implies suitability, propriety, and competence as well as the capacity to assert and maintain continued claims to social value. Interest and investment in athletic ability stretches across arenas that are often seen in opposition to one another, including corporate industry, government policy, and social justice movements. In the early twentieth-century, athletic ability garnered a great deal of attention because of the way it was linked to the types of body, mind, and spirit capable of progress.
The mandate of progress regulated the thresholds of who could become a citizen, a good worker, a suitable parent, a moral consumer, a community leader, and a healthy person. By virtue of exploring the way exceptional athletic ability is produced and to what ends, this inquiry also considers the underbelly of ability; what becomes of individuals and groups who choose poorly (i.e.: degeneracy⁶ and pathology⁷), who are unable or unwilling to choose, (i.e.: paralysis and social death⁸), who are pre-chosen (i.e.: incorrigibility⁹ and disability¹⁰)? While it may seem a stretch to link drastic violence to a popular cultural sports history project, negotiations of life and death animate the history of sports in general, and the history of women’s basketball more specifically.

At the same time, sports, as unavoidably embodied pursuits, generate surpluses beyond the socio-political regimes that grant them meaning. While athletic ability governs hegemonic economies of value, sports set in motion a dialectic of the capture and excess of recognizable value. After all, bodies are messy and play is fun. Things don’t always go as planned, and once set in motion, bodies and feelings are hard to control even, and especially, when they aspire toward proficiency. As activity and interaction unfold, the surplus (of meaning, of power, and of value) is one thing we can surely count on. Sports are half mastery and half mystery, full of discipline and disinhibition at the same time. This is precisely the tension that I wish to engage in the following historical investigation.

Introduction

This dissertation explores the emergence and popularization of women’s basketball in the United States between 1900 and 1940, with special emphasis on the 1920s and 1930s. It traces the function of athletic ability within these developments. By doing so, I demonstrate how early twentieth-century women’s basketball, in its various iterations, became entangled in industrial
nation-state governance, political economy, and urban cultural publics. I argue women’s athletic ability is one expression of the broader calculus of ability that makes up economies of social value hinged to humanist hierarchies of race and gender. In doing so, I make visible the way women’s basketball became a technology of that linked race, gender and ability together. This dissertation demonstrates, through the example of women’s basketball, a biopolitical investment shared by twentieth-century US-based community, nation-state, and capital formations as they intersect with sports: the reliance on athletic ability as physical evidence of social value through insidious logics of supremacy and hierarchy.

Women’s basketball achieved a multivalent social utility closely tied to the overdetermination and overrepresentation of athletic ability. Athletic ability was situated amidst multiple struggles over epistemological meaning, aesthetic sentiment, ontological existence, and phenomenological experience of racialized gender in the early twentieth century. Bringing together conceptual frameworks from sports studies, disability studies, and critiques on biopolitics of racialized gender, I establish the way ableism fundamentally governs all modern sports. Essentially, this marks athletic ability as an expression of a much larger problem of ability, which lies at the heart of what Sylvia Wynter calls “coloniality of being.” Women’s basketball was not a stage for an already consolidated expression of natural athletic ability, gender, or race. Instead, it was part of the biopolitical machinery that actually produced athletic ability through the cultural politics of racialized gender and in turn, it further catalyzed athletic ability as a caesura of racialized gender. I trace the way athletic ability was biopolitically refracted in the historical development of women’s basketball.

Basketball produced types of women, types of workers, and types of spaces in part because it articulated athletic ability to progressive futurity, capital accumulation, and social
mobility. By critically interpreting how athletic ability was rendered valuable in three different scenes of women’s basketball, namely in physical education, industrial workplaces, and urban publics, I show how women’s basketball is a particularly insightful vantage point from which to see the articulation of gender, race, and ability in the twentieth-century United States. At the same time, by exploring the way athletic ability functioned differentially in women’s basketball, I show how the game became an articulation of cultural struggle as well. Following this juxtaposition, I contend that we have yet to fully dispense with the logic of ability that undergirds the right to human life in modernity. Until we push ourselves to do so, our political investments in sports will continue to fail in their ambitions for equality. This is the spirit with which I trace the triumphs and tribulations that occurred during the early growth of a game that many, including myself, have come to love.

This project situates these struggles over social legibility and legitimacy during the late Progressive Era into the interwar period, a period of tumultuous social transformation. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu remarked that sport emerges within a “larger field of struggles over the definition of the legitimate body and the legitimate use of the body.” Following Bourdieu’s suggestion that the cultural phenomenon of sport is a rich site for the study of struggles over legible and legitimate embodiment and its associated meanings, I take up women’s basketball as a case study of the relationship between racialized gender and athletic ability. Urban industrialization, mass migrations within and into the United States, race- and gender-based political movements for citizenship, an emerging nation-state surveillance apparatus and the expansion of the social and life sciences, as well as reformer philanthropy, post-World War I economic and military expansion, all contributed to the socio-historical playing field in which basketball developed. I explore how this early twentieth-century constellation of state, capital,
and cultural formations cultivated the momentum women’s basketball achieved in the United States. Women’s basketball emerged in a moment when new opportunities for social mobility were met with new strategies for the securitization of hegemonic power. Women’s basketball, and the bodies of the athletes who played it, were sites for the articulation and sedimentation of broader cultural norms surrounding human value and worth, as well as the contestation and disruption of these norms. The game became a technology that people used to achieve both of these goals. As such, it became an occasion for comparison, competition, and contradiction, across people and places. This happened in part due to the way athletic ability was transposed onto biopolitical social mobility, or in other words, the ability to capacitate social value within hierarchies grounded in heteropatriarchy and white supremacy. In examining this tension, I propose to develop answers to the following questions:

1) What was the cultural impact of women’s basketball in the early twentieth-century United States?

2) How did athletic ability in women’s basketball fit into the organization and contestation of early twentieth-century US population and territory management?

To answer these questions, I rely on interdisciplinary historical and geographic research methods. I gather data from published training manuals, major newspapers, and individual team records, as well as governmental and non-governmental reports concerned with social welfare, physical education, industrial labor relations, and urban recreation, and neighborhood demography. Deploying discourse analysis and spatial analysis, I assess this data to document the biopolitical dimensions of athletic ability that create the imagined political, economic, and cultural value of women’s basketball. These materials provide the basis for the claims I make about the influences of physical education, industrial organization, and urban cultural publics on
the popularization of women’s basketball. From these materials, I also trace how these influences positioned athletic ability as valuable in different ways and for different ends.

More specifically, this dissertation enacts a cultural materialist genealogy of athletic ability and extends Foucault’s understanding of the body. Foucault writes:

The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body.

My focus on athletic ability in women’s basketball contributes to a better understanding of the modern imprint of racialized gender upon the body and upon the particular elements of this process of imprinting and destruction that basketball, as a technology, makes possible. Foucault calls the body “the inscribed surface of events” which is fitting because much of this dissertation explores how the body, as a tactile and visual surface, came to be charged with different meanings that indicated not so much the characteristics of liberal subjectivity, but rather the discourses that emerged in the crises of liberal subjection in a particular historical moment. Focusing on physical culture centers the process of “historical destruction of the body” and helps us see how historical processes render the body meaningful even as they ultimately require its attrition. Providing a “provisional definition,” Foucault writes that genealogy can be understood as the “coupling together of scholarly erudition and local memories, which allows us to constitute a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of that knowledge in contemporary tactics.” Therefore, a genealogy traces the tension and struggle over legibility and legitimacy, paying particular attention to the body itself. Further, genealogy “is a way of
playing local, discontinuous, disqualified, or non-legitimized knowledges off against the unitary theoretical instances that claims to be able to filter them, organize them into a hierarchy, organize them in the name of a true body of knowledge...”

In following this method, the project traces the tension between the biopolitical work athletic ability does in women’s basketball to secure racialized gender and the failure in this work to fully encompass or totalize the experience of embodied knowledge that simultaneously accrues.

**U.S. Progressive and Interwar Era Contexts**

The Progressive Era, generally understood to extend from the 1890s through the 1920s, is a well-known zenith for widespread conflict and transformation in cultural, legal, commercial, and political arenas. Richard Hofstadter has called the referred to the period of US history between the 1890s up through World War II as the “age of reform.” While the age of reform stretches across the first half of the twentieth century, the Progressive Era and interwar years were a particularly pronounced time for conflicts around categories of gender, sexuality, race, class, and ability. Scholars have established the height of Progressive Era between 1900 and the start of World War I in 1914. Yet, some have pushed its origin back to the Civil War and extended its influence into the 1930s. Despite these debates on zenith there is agreement that the Progressive Era signals the origins of modern twentieth century America.

The Progressive Era takes its name from the social reform campaigns that characterized the period. New formally enfranchised political subjects had become legible around the demarcations of US citizenship as well as assimilable, inassimilable, and excludable immigrants (Johnson Reed Act). Culturally, the archetypes of the “New Woman” and the “New Negro” signaled new demands on the rights of self-determination and personal sovereignty previously afforded to white men, the universalized referents of “possessive individualism.” Newly crafted
subject categories, like the juvenile, the adolescent, the unfit and the insane also emerged during this period. The Progressive Era was characterized not by strident advances toward progress and liberal equality but by vicious struggles between people over rights, especially those related to self-determination and freedom of movement.

Historian Michael McGerr has distilled four major areas of concern for middle- and upper-class social reformers that characterize the Progressive Era. These include the desire to “change other people, to end class conflict, to control big business, and to segregate society.” These middle and upper-class, mostly white, reformers were not altruistic. They were deeply motivated to secure the realm of social reproduction in conjunction with visions of progress. They articulated novel forms of social control in the face of nominal expansions of sovereignty.

Progressive Era reformers latched onto vice as an organizing category for a number of moral issues like drug and alcohol use, prostitution, and organized crime. Vice gave a secular vocabulary to sin, emphasizing environmental causations over behaviors that needed to be stamped out. Similarly, settlement houses and neighborhoods were managed in an effort to keep cities clean, assimilate immigrants, and segregate ethnic communities. The question of childhood development and public education was paired with the anxiety over juvenile delinquency and the degenerative influence of street life. In the realm of government, they sought federal legislation to curtail corporate, corruption, and joined with nativist labor movements on the issues of minimum wages, child labor, workday length and work safety. The specter of evolutionary thought and the principles of social Darwinism buttressed public health, hygiene, and germ campaigns. By the end of the Progressive Era, the US had transformed from an agrarian national economy to an industrial urban one.
The Progressive Era opened into the interwar years, as the United States experienced economic growth and a “return to normalcy” coming out of World War I. By this time the United States started to experience the sedimentation of earlier turn of the century changes in politics, economics, technology, and culture as well as the limits of these reforms. Economically, the upswings of post WWI stimulus and the downturns of recession and depression entailed stark polarities observable in the period between 1920 and 1940. In popular parlance, the 1920s have been called by a number of titles, including the Jazz Age, the Roaring Twenties, the Lost Generation, and the Golden Age of Sport. Consumer publics were growing more robust with the accumulation of post-war capital and the marketing of technological developments such as automobiles, radios, telephones, railway transportation, film, and electrical appliances. Taylorism ascended as a paradigm for corporate and industrial management espousing optimum efficiency.

Cities experienced tremendous changes in demography as well as infrastructure. Skyscrapers and slums emerged in tandem. Municipal utilities and public spaces became increasingly accessible alongside rising anxieties over sanitation and disease. Urban populations swelled in an unprecedented fashion. The 1920 census reported 68 cities with populations of at least 100,000 and for the first time in US history, the percentage of people living in cities exceeded 50 percent. Workers and families poured into Northern and Midwestern US cities in search of new factory jobs and spent their wages in the burgeoning realms of urban recreation and leisure. Migration patterns of two major groups, foreign-born immigrants and African Americans from the Southeastern United States, largely fueled this urban growth. Between 1910 and 1930, the African-American population in Northern states increased by about forty percent and by 1930 almost 1.5 million southerners had resettled out of the Jim Crow South. Foreign
immigration into the United States continued to increase up until the Great Depression. Immigration went almost formally unregulated at the federal level until the 1920s. In 1924, the Johnson-Reed Act enacted literacy requirements, restrictive quotas, and established the US Border Patrol to restrict immigration flows and naturalization avenues. By the 1930s a more aggressive pattern of restriction, repatriation, and deportation was undertaken by the US nation-state. This strategy intended to curtail and contain the growing urban proletariat.

Following the late nineteenth-century fulfillment of Manifest Destiny and settlement of the continental frontier, the US entrenched its nation state form and expanded its geopolitical reach. The early twentieth century saw colonial occupation, annexation, military expansion and warfare. US foreign policy proceeded as an extension of President Wilson’s reasoning for US involvement in WWI, made famous by the slogan “the world must be made safe for democracy.” This intersection of military might and financial diplomacy (through the Dawes Plan in Western Europe and invocations of the Monroe Doctrine in Latin America) helped the US ascend toward the status of a global hegemon. Amongst other countries, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Panama, Haiti, and Cuba all experienced heavy US intervention. Additionally, a domestic state sponsored strategy was developed to counteract Left wing dissent, to shore up national borders and to substantiate federal claims to US territory. Most notable examples of this include the consolidation of the US-Mexico border, the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous lands and peoples after a string of late nineteenth-century US Indian Wars, and the first Red Scare which propelled surveillance against socialist, communist, and anarchist influence following the Russian Revolution of 1917.

US colleges and universities also experienced increased enrollments and newer social science disciplines, like sociology, criminology, anthropology and urban planning, became
institutionalized. They became sites where scientific and pseudo-scientific approaches to the study of society and societal problems were undertaken from varying ideological positions. The emphasis on the scientific method and rationale extended guiding ontological and epistemological principles of Western modernity rooted since the Enlightenment. In this regard, social scientists aspired not only to identify problems and acquire data on social entities, but to deploy statistical and rational analyses in the service of prediction and intervention. The applied goal of research was ultimately societal progress. At the same time, many social groups grasped onto the language of progress and civilization to stake claims to power. As Gail Bederman writes:

‘civilization’ was protean in its applications. Different people used it to legitimize conservatism and change, male dominance and militant feminism, white racism and African American resistance…feminists pointed to civilization to demonstrate the importance of women’s advancement. African Americans cited civilization to prove the necessity of racial egalitarianism. Thus, the interesting thing about “civilization” is not what was meant by the term, but the multiple ways it was used to legitimize different sorts of claims to power.  

By the turn of the twentieth century, the human body had congealed into a distinct source of knowledge that rendered evidence about one’s relationship civilization and primitivism. Social scientists continued to look to race and sex as the primary categories with respect to difference in and on human body and their perspective translated into popular cultural sentiments. Eugenics and sexology all extended beyond academic circles into the popular fray. Social Darwinism had achieved popular appeal as “natural selection,” “sexual selection,” and “survival of the fittest” were applied to questions of social and cultural difference. In the
midst of growing scientific and social scientific knowledge bases, the body was further opened up as a source of raw data to be mined for useful knowledge and then cultivated accordingly and with the rise of mass leisure, bodies were also out on display in new ways.

**Emergence and Proliferation of Women’s Basketball**

Women’s basketball finds its origin and growing popularity in these Progressive Era and interwar circumstances and their incumbent ideologies of individual and societal progress. The game of basketball was invented in 1891 by James Naismith at an International YMCA Training Camp in Springfield, Massachusetts. Basketball was unique in its modern origins in that it was not an outgrowth of a more traditional game. The big three, basketball, baseball, and football, form the anchor of major US team sports. While baseball and football emerge out of British colonial importation of cricket and rugby, basketball is widely held up as a distinctly American invention. Historian Allen Guttman writes, “it had no recognizable antecedents. It was made to order, cut from whole cloth in response to a specific request.”

In 1890, Naismith left McGill University in Canada for his new appointment as a physical educator at the International YMCA Training Camp, an institute that trained young men to become YMCA administrators and secretaries. Naismith and his contemporaries were proponents of “muscular Christianity” bringing the soul and mind under the body’s stead. As the popular origin story goes, Naismith’s mentor, Luther H. Gulick asked him to think up a game that would be suitable as indoor physical education during cold New England winters. Specifically, Naismith needed a game to contain a rowdy group of boy campers who were used to playing tackle games outside. This group was nicknamed the “incorrigibles” by staff, a term meaning beyond improvement or reformation and a choice negative word coming from these social reformer educators. Gulick implored
Naismith to find an “athletic distraction” that would fit within a small space and keep athletes active through the winter.

Within days of their first game, the class was visited by interested audiences. By his own account, Naismith remembers, “although basketball was originated in a men’s institution, it was scarcely a month old when it was taken up by girls.”32 Among their visitors were women teachers from a nearby grade school. Naismith offered them time in the gym to play basketball and before long they found another team of women teachers to play against. While these were likely the first women to play Naismith’s game, it was a Smith College physical educator named Senda Berenson who became the “Mother of Women’s Basketball” for her role in adapting and spreading the popularity of basketball among women. A network of YMCA’s helped spread the game in the United States, Canada, and even globally.33 The first professional men’s squads formed a league in 1898.34 This was made possible by industrial railroad shipping system and included teams from industrial cities through the Northeast.35 Colleges across the United States started fielding competitive and intramural men’s teams. And soon, youth got a chance to play as well. The game of basketball caught on like wildfire among men and women alike. By the 1900’s, the initial infrastructure had been well laid out by efforts in the fields of education, philanthropy, and industry. Basketball became incredibly popular among a wide variety of people. It was one of very few team sports women played and it was the only major US sport that generated a men’s and women’s game in close adjacency.

Following efforts by Senda Berenson and Clara Baer, elite women’s colleges incorporated basketball into physical education programs and this trickled down to secondary education as well. Not limited to daily schools, basketball was also taught to girls and women in religious and neighborhood clubs, ethnic white immigrant settlement houses,36 Native American
boarding schools, as well as African American secondary and technical institutions. These included, for example, the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), Jane Addams’ Hull House in Chicago, the Chilloc Indian Agricultural School in Oklahoma, and the Nannie Helen Burroughs National Training School for Women and Girls in Washington, DC. While these pedagogical institutions served distinct political and social purposes, they shared their desire for progressive civilization and women’s basketball became a feature in each one. Before long, women’s basketball also found itself annexed to industrial workplaces and became a professional pursuit in its own right. Some of the most recognizable corporations in US history, like Hanes, Monsanto, Johnson and Johnson, would go on to sponsor women’s teams and smaller entrepreneurial barnstorming outfits started travelling around the country playing exhibition games and connecting the circuitry of small towns and cities. These kinds of teams would play in front of hundreds and sometimes thousands who were curious to consume human oddities and feats.

By the early 1920s, basketball had been around for almost a generation and had had already become a notably widespread cultural activity undertaken by diverse groups. A 1917 Sporting Life column relayed this sentiment noting, “basket ball has made giant strides since it was introduced, and the sport has grown enormously in popular interest until today there is hardly a school or church organization that does not boast of a team. Even the girls have taken it up…” Thus, by the dawn of the Roaring Twenties, basketball had matured from a game played by men at Northeastern YMCA summer camp into a game played by girls and women from different race, class, and national backgrounds across the United States and beyond. Within the zenith of the 1920s’ cultural revolutions, basketball roared too. Even as the Great Depression created major economic downturn in the 1930s and consumer-based spectator publics were
shaken, women still continued to play basketball for their churches, employers, schools, and communities.

Women’s basketball was in no way uniform. Rather, it was a multifocal cultural pursuit shared and contested by many. It was played by many different rules, but it was played almost everywhere. Women played separately from as well as alongside and against men. Athletes were sometimes paid professionals and unpaid amateurs. Some teams were racially integrated while others were distinctly organized to represent specific racial and ethnic communities. The women’s college game developed along upper-class networks while industrial and professional leagues featured more working and middle-class participation. The sport was in no way standardized; it took on local and regional characteristics, idiosyncrasies, and styles. It was practiced through different vernaculars that reflected local constituencies and emphasized different aspects of athletic ability. Women’s basketball played a role in the realms of education, work, and cultural community and while each iteration encounters a specific history, for example the histories of social reform minded physical education, efficiency and paternalism in industrial management, and cultural uplift through community recreation. The investment in women’s athletic ability as a social utility was shared by all of them.

A rich scholarly literature has traced the heterogeneous proliferation of the game of women’s basketball. Yet, no book length study has engaged the historical phenomenon of early twentieth-century women’s basketball as a technology that harnessed athletic ability to racialized gender. In the following literature review, I bring together the theoretical frameworks contributions that make my inquiry possible. Foundationally, my approach builds on two primary concepts that I use to understand the concepts of racialized gender and ability. They are Michel Foucault’s concept of biopolitics and Sylvia Wynter’s concept of the “overrepresentation of
Man.” In addition, I build on scholarly contributions made in the fields of sports studies and disability studies and the ways they help situate biopolitics and the “overrepresentation of Man” as relevant to historical investigation into athletic ability in women’s basketball. First, I review two important themes in sports studies scholarship, namely Foucauldian inspired sociological work which identifies the technological element in sports, and people’s history of sports grounded in anti-racist and anti-colonial cultural studies. These two bodies of work help elucidate the matrix of domination and resistance through which sports, as physical cultural activities, take on meaning and become sites of power. Following this, I consider what tools disability studies offers for critically re-assessing both the scope and the implications of ableism in the world of sports. Then I turn to Foucault and Wynter to situate modern sports within humanist biopolitics. From there, I theorize how ability gets articulated into the modernist epistemologies and ontologies of racialized gender. After setting up this conceptual platform, I turn to back to the case study of early twentieth-century women’s basketball to explore how these themes played in grounded and embodied historical activity.

**Domination and Liberation in Sports Studies**

In this research, I understand basketball as a technology. With respect to realm of physical culture, sports act as technologies. Sports are perhaps the most popular form that organized physical culture takes. As Jennifer Hargreaves and Patricia Anne Vertinsky note, “by physical culture we are referring to those activities where the body itself – its anatomy, its physicality, and importantly its forms of movement – is the very purpose, the raison d’être, of the activity.”

Sports bring together bodily materiality and the activity upon a cultural plane. Technology is defined as “a) the branch of knowledge dealing with mechanical arts and applied sciences, the study of this, b) the application of such knowledge for practice purposes…...
sphere of activity concerned with this…c) the product of such application; technological knowledge or know-how; a technological process, method, or technique…”⁴⁹ In the most general way, technology implies applied knowledge and the application or practice of particular techniques that are informed by knowledge and recursively inform the production of more knowledge. C.L. Cole writes that, sport “is most usefully understood as a technology in the Foucauldian sense, an ensemble of knowledges and practices that disciplines, conditions, reshapes and inscribes the body through the terms and needs of a patriarchal, racist capitalism.”⁵⁰

To think about basketball as a technology grounds it as applied knowledge and material practice that adopts the body as both an instrument and goal or the tool and the outcome. Sports studies scholars like Cole and others, have built on this Foucauldian orientation to sports as a technology.⁵¹ Feminist sports studies scholars have asked what goals sports, as technologies, accomplish, especially for female bodied subjects and for the social construction of gender. Pirkko Markula notes, “Following Michel Foucault, feminist sport scholars have demonstrated how women’s physical activity can act as a technology of domination that anchors women into a discursive web of normalizing practices.”⁵² Here, Markula references a number of scholarly contributions that make visible the way women’s sports produce disciplinary positions that fit within the logic of heteropatriarchal domination. Yet, Markula also highlights another Foucauldian inspired technological (and ethical) dimension explored in feminist sports studies, “technology of the self.”⁵³ For Foucault, technologies of the self-described an ethical relationality that functioned over and against technologies of domination. Technologies of self are thus moments of possibility in reformulation and freedom that flowed through the individual but could not be reduced to the effect of subjective self-possession. Sport studies scholars have been attracted to this concept in part it helps explain how sports gather “techniques through
which individuals seek to focus on and change their self to attain a particular state of being”.\textsuperscript{54}

This tension between technologies of domination and technologies of self has been a particularly compelling framework from which sports studies scholars have chosen to understand the position of the athlete and the crafting of athletic ability in relation to questions of liberation and freedom. Another Foucauldian sports studies scholar, Toby Miller, writes, “Sport is a key site of pleasure and domination, via a complex dialectic that does not always produce a clear synthesis from the clash of opposing camps. It involves both the imposition of authority from above and the joy of autonomy from below. It exemplifies the exploitation of the labor process, even as it delivers autotelic pleasures.”\textsuperscript{55} Sports, as technologies of self, reproduce desire, pleasure and forms of surplus that are not reducible to docility. This dynamic between technologies self and of domination is one way that sports studies scholars have chosen to see the radical or liberating potential that resides in sports.

Another way that sports studies scholars, in particular sports historians, have chosen to approach questions of freedom and liberation, is through the perspective of “peoples’ history.”\textsuperscript{56} People’s history, or what E.P Thompson called “history from below,” focuses on the experiences, struggles, and triumphs of oppressed people instead of dominant groups or institutions.\textsuperscript{57} Many of these scholars write out of the Left tradition and critically attune to politics of anti-racist and anti-colonial struggle.\textsuperscript{58} These authors have showed how sports are an inspirational site for cultural and political struggles that disrupt hegemonic domination. In recognizing this, they argue that sports are not just a part of the toolbox of domination nor are they just “opiates of the masses”\textsuperscript{59} intended for “mass deception.”\textsuperscript{60} Two foundational works that exemplify this tenet include Harry Edward’s \textit{Revolt of the Black Athlete} which details the 1968 Olympic protests and boycott and C.L.R. James’ \textit{Beyond a Boundary}, an autobiographical
memoir on the colonial politics of cricket in Trinidad as well as the decolonial ambitions inspired through cricket. Relatedly, Dave Zirin’s *A People’s History of Sports in the United States* argues that sport is a site of symbolic representation, political education, and peoples’ practiced resistance against oppression and domination within the context of the long arc of Western capitalism and empire. He explores a variety of sports in the United States, focusing on topics like desegregation, labor struggles, and social protest. Weaving Leftist social movement history oriented around racial equality, economic justice and decolonization together with US sports history, Zirin enacts a deconstruction of dominant narratives of American history through his assessment of sports and athletes and their powers to resist, disrupt, and dissent. From these accounts and others, we have learned to value the important role sports have played in struggles for liberation. This scholarly tradition is important because it rescues a reductionist account of the politics of sport from some on the Left who would criticize sports as superfluous distraction to properly political matters. This scholarship also cautions against an overly idealistic orientation to sports that delink them from structures of domination racial capitalism, empire, and to a lesser extent, heteropatriarchy.

The majority of sports studies scholarship has largely overlooked the intersection of sports and disability. For example, one of the most comprehensive overviews of critical theory applied to sports has been Richard Giulianotti’s book, *Sport: A Critical Sociology*, published in 2015. While I would largely agree that the book “engages critically with core theories and substantive research themes,” it rarely addresses the problem of able-embodiment. The words disability and disabled occur only a handful of times in over 200 pages of writing and appear in one paragraph that mentions work on elite Paralympic athletes. Giulianotti’s only engagement with the intersection of sports and disability, and by extension ability, is through reference to
Silva and Howe’s work on the figure of the “supercrip” in sports. Silva and Howe argue that Paralympic athletes are positioned as “supercrip” heroes who have overcome adversity to succeed despite their disabilities and emerge as fully empowered role models. The consequence of this association of Paralympic athletes with access to able-bodied athletic success is that, “the superiorisation of these athletes further distances their lives from those of ‘ordinary’ people with impairments” and in doing so, further marginalizes people with disabilities by reinsuring the value of able-bodiedness through athletic ability. In this way, focus on the unlikely and exceptional achievements of disabled athletes does little to disrupt the structure of ableism.

While the majority of work in sports studies does not focus on the issue of disability, in addition to work led by Howe and Silva and others on the topic of elite disabled athletes, there is a growing body of scholarship that argues for that sports need to be made inclusive for people with disabilities. While these are important contributions, they nevertheless tend to reduce the political implications of ability-based value systems, making them primarily relevant only for people with disabilities. Even as disability is questioned as a socially produced category, ability remains relatively undertheorized.

While the above-mentioned scholarship has been important in helping people see the power stakes in sports participation and spectatorship, these sports studies frameworks have not fully dealt with the paradigms of ability that animates both the limiting and liberatory potential of athletic ability in sports. Sports studies literature that deals with issues of power with respect to gender and race rarely criticizes the modernist structure of ability that infuses the intelligibility of racialized gender. Consequentially, ability remains uninterrogated. Further, ability remains discrete from race and gender and the power systems that produced them as epistemological and ontological categories. Too often disability is listed among an ever-lengthening itemization of
“master statuses” that familiarly list out race, class, gender, sexuality, age, disability, etc, etc. As others have argued before, this listing can render these statuses or categories in parallel lines, and unfortunately then fail to address the conceptual complexity with which ability is expressed through hierarchies of racialized gender. This has led to myopia around the theme of athleticism in the histories of sporting heroes as symbols or evidence of racial excellence, class ascension, national progress, the overcoming of gender inequality and even the triumphs of disabled athletes. Ultimately, I argue that this body of literature has yet to fully investigate the romance of ability as mastery or the corollary inspection of the athlete as a humanist subject that initiates the very reason why so many people play and follow sports.

Nothing the universalizing appeal of sports, French philosopher Roland Barthes observed:

What is sport? Sport replies with another question: which is the best? Sport gives new meaning to the question of the ancient duels, for here man's superiority is measured only in relationship to things. Which man is best able to overcome the resistance of things, the immobility of nature? Which is the best able to harness the world and give it to man ... to all mankind? This is what sport stands for. Occasionally people try to make it stand for something else. But this is not what sport was meant for… What is sport? What is it that man puts into sport? Himself, his world. Sport is intended as a statement of the human contract.67

Here, Barthes touches on two fundamental elements that create the conditions wherein sports become vectors of struggle over power. They are comparison and superiority. Sports require comparison and competition, and because of this, they are fundamentally linked to schemes of hierarchy and superiority. Athletic ability, when disconnected from ability, becomes a lever
through which hierarchies are sedimented and superiority can be either affirmed or denied, but not disarticulated. As Barthes claims, sports reiterate “the human contract”; they become moments of struggle over the epistemologies and ontologies that spring from universal humanism, and by looking at the role of athletic ability in sports we can more clearly the limitations of that human contract, as a product of modern biopolitics. Foucault noted, “What I am afraid of about humanism is that it presents a certain form of our ethics as a universal model for any kind of freedom. I think that there are more secrets, more possible freedoms, and more inventions in our future than we can imagine in humanism as it is dogmatically represented on every side of the political rainbow: the Left, the Center, the Right.” The valuation, by virtue of the lack of interrogation, of athletic ability is one characteristic shared across the political spectrum that requires further disarticulation if we are to truly grapple with the intersection of sports and struggles for freedom.

Athletic Ability in the Shadow of Ableism

In this section, I look to disability studies scholarship to fill in some of the lacuna that sports studies has left with respect to the question or problem of ability. In what follows, I detail how disability studies scholarship has understood the problem of ableism. Acknowledging these important perspectives on able-bodiedness as an effect of power, my work slightly diverges from the focus on the production of disability and instead addresses the problem of ability, from the vantage point of the exceptional, or extra-ordinary, forms of athletic ability that are crucial to sporting cultures. I explore the contributions and limitations of disability studies for considering the way that ability is tethered to ableism. Rather than being discrete from discrimination on the basis of race and gender, I instead build on the perspective that ableism is the mode of expression through which hierarchies of racialized gender themselves are also materialized.
Disability studies has been the primary site where the most prominent critiques of ableism have emerged. Ableism is popularly understood as “discrimination in favor of able-bodied people”. In popular parlance, ableism basically means discrimination against disabled people. This understanding highlights the stigma and prejudice that negatively affects disabled people and the privileges that able-bodied people and more recently, with greater acknowledgement of mental or intellectual disabilities, that able-minded people enjoy. The naming of this form of systemic discrimination could not have been made possible without decades of disability rights activism. Some disability rights advocates have transformed the landscape of language, instead preferring terms like “people with disabilities” or “differently abled” in distinction to “disabled people”, which they argue collapses disability from an attribute to an identity. While others prefer the term “disabled people” because of the very fact that it does name an identity.

Disability studies scholars, in conversation with disability activists, have drawn attention the process of social construction that produces identifiably abled-bodied or disabled people. In this sense, one of the most important contributions of disability studies has been to show that disability and ability are not natural or biological, but instead they are outcomes of belief systems that produce meaningful bodies through value-based hierarchy. A medical model of disability would understand illness and impairment to be a material fact. Yet, a social model encompasses the experience of disability one has in a social or cultural system. This important distinction renders ability a social product not necessarily a biological fact thereby making disability a social construct not an individual one. As with much other work on social construction, this scholarship identifies the way disability is produced through norms. Gregor Wolbring argues that “ableism in its general form leads to an ability based and ability justified understanding of oneself, one’s
body, one’s relationship with others within one’s species, other species and one’s environment.”

In this sense, ableism is societally pervasive and influences people, bodies, relationships and the environment.

Various disability studies scholars draw attention to the idea of “ableist normativity” or able-bodiedness as a “normate” status. For Garland Thomson, the normate is a “figure outlined by an array of deviant others whose marked bodies shore up the norm’s boundaries” and “the constructed identity of those who, by way of bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them”.

She argues that “by scrutinizing the disabled figure as the paradigm of what culture calls deviant” one exposes “the assumptions that support seemingly neutral cultural norms.” To this Robert McRuer adds that while able-bodiedness is actually impossible to totally embody, it is nonetheless compulsory. Fiona Campbell defines ableism as “a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human.”

This definition of ableism reiterates the requisite work of normalization to create an idealized normate type against which other variations are measured by virtue of proximity to this ideal. Elsewhere Campbell notes that, “in order for the notion of ableness to exist and to transmogrify into the sovereign subject, the normate individual of liberalism, it must a constitutive outside- that is it must participate in a logic of supplementarity” Here the constitutive outside is disability.

Campbell continues, “in so far as this conception of disability is assumed within discourses of ableism, the presence of disability upsets the modernist craving for ontological security.”

Scholars have chosen to intercept the problem of ableism by exposing how disability is produced in normative discourses. As Tobin Siebers writes,
The ideology of ability is at its simplest the preference for able-bodiedness. At its most radical, it defines the baseline by which humanness is determined, setting the measure of body and mind that gives or denies human status to individual persons. It effects nearly all our judgements, definitions, and values about human beings, but because it is discriminatory and exclusionary, it creates social location outside and critical of its purview, most notably in this case, the perspective of disability.  

With this attention to the way disability defines the limits of who is counted as human, disability studies scholars have explored the problem of ableism in a wide variety of topics. Yet, this sometimes has the effect of establishing a polar relationship between ability and disability, one that belies the machinations in how the two are produced sometimes in and through one another.

More recently, disability scholars have paid greater attention to the ways ability is produced as well. Preferring the term “dis/ability” Dan Godley writes, “dis/ability is also a moment of contemplation: to think again about what it means to be dis/abled and what it means to be human.” Any account of disability is in part an investigation of ability too. Thinking about how disability and ability are co-constituted is thus, investigating what is means to be human, not just as a biological creature but as a social-historical one. While disability is a consequence of the structure of ableism, ability is largely avoided as a research topic and instead is presented as a thing that is compulsory, having real effects but not quite having a real or material effect on the bodies of people who are not negatively positioned by it. Perhaps because of this tendency, sports are rarely taken up by disability scholars. But, sports are important because they give us a test case from which to study how ableism is reproduced from the position of investment, privilege, and desire and the way women’s sports are situated both by histories of proximity and distance from the normate ideal of white able-bodied masculinity.
With the exception of disability-based inclusion in sports, disabling injury, or the exceptional ability of elite disabled athletes, sports are rarely mentioned in disability studies as sites from which to interrogate the reproduction of ableism through inquiry into the way athletic ability becomes extra-ordinary.

One exception to this trend can be found in Kim Q. Hall’s introduction to the anthology *Feminist Disability Studies*. Hall frames her introduction around two counter-posed gender deviant figures from current events, Ashley X and Caster Semenya. Caster Semenya is a young Black South African track and field athlete who became the subject of much scrutiny and subsequent gender verification testing after her femaleness was thrown into question following her successes as a runner. Hall writes, “dominant conceptions of disability would place world-class athletes and disabled people in different categories with the “overcoming narrative” the only place where the two overlap in dominant discourses about disability.” While the ideal body is unachievable, successful athletes sometimes approximate this ideal position, especially when they win, and in this way, sports become scenes of physical culture that support normative idealism around what kind of body one should strive for or what kind of body one deserves. However, as shown in Hall’s exploration of Caster, athletes can also test the limits of what a normal body, particularly, a normal woman’s body is supposed to look like and what is supposed to be able to do. For Hall, Semenya’s extra-ordinary “athletic prowess” is actually the grounds whereby she is defined as deviantly gendered. And of course, her deviant status is also inextricable from her visibility as a Black South African. Hall poses the question, “How is gendered disability and dis- or en-abled gender racialized?” In a somewhat similar fashion, the primary question this dissertation theoretically seeks to answer is: how is gendered ability racialized and how is racialized gender enabled?
In this work, I build on the perspectives laid by disability studies scholars, but I focus on the construction of ability and the way it emerges in and through racial and gender categories. Because the implications of ableism exceed dimensions of what we perceive as disability, studying ability necessarily requires perspectives beyond what is properly conceived as the category of the disabled. Alison Kafer argues for a political relational model of disability that acknowledges how understanding of disability has been influenced other power structures. She writes, “these forgings [of disability] have always already been inflected by histories of race, gender, sexuality, class, and nation”\textsuperscript{82} While this a crucial and quite intersectional understanding of the way disability interlocks with other histories and systems of power, it runs the risk of positioning ableism as parallel or analogous to other normalized institutional systems of oppression, such as racism, sexism, cis-genderism to name a few. For example, Susan Schweik’s \textit{Ugly Laws} posits a sharp historical account of ugly laws that were enacted in the early twentieth century to police non-normative bodies in public space. In it, she demonstrates how unsightliness was marked by bodily hierarchies transected by the politics of racism, classism, nativism, sexism, as well as ableism.\textsuperscript{83}

In addition to impairment, scholars concerned with the biopolitical nature of disability have demonstrated how structures of ableism also produce peripheral forms of lively embodiment that emerge from regimes of population and territory management. Mitchell and Synder’s \textit{The Biopolitics of Disability: Neoliberalism, Ablenationalism, and Peripheral Embodiment} posits a “nonnormative positivist account of disability as conditioned by mechanisms of both inclusion and exclusion, paying particular attention to the way inclusion “obscures at least as much as it reveals.”\textsuperscript{84} Their term ablenationalism elucidates a “convergence of nationalism and biopolitics…the ground zero of ableism.”\textsuperscript{85} Placing disability in a biopolitical
regime is helpful in addressing not only the repressive elements of ableism, but the productive elements as well. Jasbir Puar makes an important contribution to the field of disability studies by addressing the role of debility in tandem and in distinction to disability and the ways the two are linked to global biopolitical regimes of capacitation. Puar writes, “inviting a deconstruction of what able-bodiedness and capacity mean (they are not equivalent to each other), affectively and otherwise, entails schematizing the biopolitics of debility, one that destabilizes the seamless production of able bodies in relation to disability and also suggests the capacitation of disabled bodies through circuits of (white) racial and economic privilege, citizenship status, and legal, medical, and social accommodations.”

Here Puar interrupts the conflation with able-bodiedness and capacity in order to argue that what we understand as poles of ability and disability are actually extremely variegated by the processes of capitalism and empire that produce distinctions, and violence, through the categories of race, nation, and class.

In a related, but different way, this project also attempts to strike a wedge between the transposition of ability and life with the goal of investigating a construct that is all too often overlooked, athletic ability. In doing so, I hope to reframe the problem of ableism as fundamental to what Michel Foucault called biopolitical “caesura”. This is to say, the problem with ableism is not only devaluation or discrimination on the basis of disability, but the recursive valuation of ability that variegates the biopolitics of racialized gender in the global contexts of capitalism and empire.

The Biopolitics of Racialized Gender

Sports necessarily lay at the intersection of perceived binaries of culture and nature, inherited and cultivated attributes, willfulness and chance, as well as mind and body. This is precisely the reason why they are so popular and why they carry such powerful legacies. By
virtue of their location in the adjacency of perceived binaries, sports thus rich sites to consider the relationship between biopolitics and embodiment that mark the modern era. To flesh out the humanist limits of ability in sports, I interpret athletic ability as a biopolitical articulation. From there, it becomes easier to see how women’s basketball functioned as a biopolitical technology that reproduced meanings of athletic ability. Following a Foucauldian interpretation of biopolitics as foundational to Western modernity, I detail the way Sylvia Wynter has understood this mode of power and this historical moment to coincide with racial infrastructure undergirding colonial geopolitics and resulting in an “overrepresentation of Man.”

Building from Wynter’s perspectives, I understand the concept of racialized gender as a precondition of humanity, and thus anterior to the human body, not as a posterior adjective or qualifier to it. By positioning racialized gender at the core of biopolitical order, I argue that ability shores up values systems that are based in hierarchies of racialized gender and athletic ability, as a particular instantiation of it, is best understood as a biopolitical articulation.

Michel Foucault uses the term biopower to describe a relationship wherein power and knowledge together transform material bodies into social subjects, translating biological life into a political index. In his lecture series Society Must Be Defended, Foucault describes his theory of biopower and subsequently, biopolitics. Biopolitics triangulate discipline, governance, and regularization as a reiterated series of normalizing events that come to index social value. Social value equates with the securitization and the capacitation for life. In Foucault’s oft quoted phrase, the power to kill and to let live was reconstituted but not totally replaced by the power to “make live and to let die.” Life can be fostered through governance and intervention as well as disallowed or disavowed unto death.
In his theory of biopolitics, Foucault is primarily concerned with the territory of body as the terrain upon which modern biopower flows. At the same time, the individual body is indelibly linked to other bodies, forming populations. With the rise of biological and natural sciences during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the human body became a site for the discipline of individual selfhood and nexus for population management through categorization and manipulation. He writes, “After the anatomo-politics of the human body established in the course of the eighteenth century, we have, at the end of that century, the emergence of something that is no longer an anatomo-politics of the human body, but what I would call a ‘biopolitics’ of the human race.” Biopolitics emerges alongside a racial characterization of the human species. In this sense, the idea of a human being or the human race(s) is intimately linked to the mechanics of biopower.

Foucault emphasizes the inherent dimensions of force that constitute the management of a biopolitical threshold between life and death. In this way, biopolitics names an application of power concordant with the rise of nation-state and colonial racism. Racism is the governing logic of biopolitical technologies and in his words, this logic provides a break, or a “caesura,” in the domain of valuable life. Foucault highlights how the concept of race emerged as a means to subjugate peoples by producing biopolitical difference at the level of ontological fact. This precondition of force firstly requires the production of racial difference and, secondly, the positive association with one side of that racial caesura. The integrity of racial difference is upheld by hierarchies pulled toward the poles of this caesura. While racial schema differ in expression along cultural conventions, assessments of racial value are often anchored the disavowal and dehumanization of Blackness and its antithetical relation to whiteness as a signifier. While caesura are structured through a binary valence of value, that binary is
effectively produced out of biopolitical normalizations that require ranges, domains, matrices of legitimacy.

Foucault writes:

What is racism? It is primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power’s control: the break between what must live and what must die. The appearance within the biological continuum of the human race of races, the distinction among races, the hierarchy of races, the fact that certain races are described as good and that others, in contrast are described as inferior: all this is a way of fragmenting the field of the biological that power controls. It is a way of separating out the groups that exist within a population. It is in short, a way of establishing a biological type caesura within a population that appears to be a biological domain. This will allow power to treat that population as a mixture of races, or to be more accurate the treat the species, to subdivide the species it controls, into the subspecies known, precisely, as races.93

Breaks and subdivisions between who can live and who can die are politically motivated but are sedimented by a process of naturalization, culminating in the natural history of the human race. Biopolitical thresholds are maintained and reproduced through the epistemology of race, as the primary means to understand human life and the manifestation of racism as the primary means to secure it.

Similar to Foucault, philosopher Sylvia Wynter apprehends this shift in the modern episteme in her own historicization of the concept of the “human being.” Where Foucault focuses primarily on Europe to explain the emergence of biopolitics within the modern political economy of liberal capitalism, Wynter critically departs in her explicit attention to the colonial valence of biopolitics on a global scale.94 She argues that the European turn away from religious
cosmology, the embrace of a secular, scientific reason, and the emergence of the political subject of Man were made possible by colonial exploration and conquest outside of Europe. The paragons of European intellectual and cultural endeavor found sponsorship in colonial and capital enterprise. Ultimately, revolutions in Western scientific, philosophical, and political thought that came to be known as Enlightenment were refracted through the violence of colonial conquest. Correspondingly, the universality of liberal humanism was thus reliant on the discretionary violent processes of colonialism and capitalism.95

Wynter draws the question of racial difference and thus racial hierarchy, back to the status and classification of the human being. She calls attention to the construct of Western bourgeois norms and contests their utility in the “overrepresentation” of Man as a natural, pre-social human being.96 She writes against the tendency to think of the human being as a natural, ontologically stable entity. Instead she recognizes the humanist reliance on a particular “ethn класс” to stand in for universal human existence.97 Wynter interrogates how the idea of a human being distinct from other forms of life is only achieved as natural in reference to the geopolitical “Others of Man”, who occupy the status of physical referent in distinction to Western modernity’s self-possessed and self-determining subject. In her assessment, these ‘Others of Man’ are not placed outside or at the edges of modernity. Rather, they are central and foundational to the possibility of modernity. In an interview with Wynter articulates her understanding of gender vis a vis the concept of race:

If you think about the origins of the modern world, because gender was always there, how did we institute ourselves as humans; why was gender a function of that? I’d just like to make a point here that is very important. Although I use the term ‘race,’ and I have to use the term ‘race,’ ‘race’ itself is a function of something else which is much closer to
‘gender.’ Once you say, “besides ontogeny, there’s sociogeny,” then there cannot be only one mode of sociogeny; there cannot be only one mode of being human; there are a multiplicity of modes. So I coined the word ‘genre,’ or I adapted it, because ‘genre’ and ‘gender’ come from the same root. They mean ‘kind,’ one of the meanings is ‘kind.’ Now what I am suggesting is that ‘gender’ has always been a function of the instituting of ‘kind.’...I am trying to insist that ‘race’ is really a code-word for ‘genre.’ Our issue is not the issue of ‘race.’ Our issue is the issue of the genre of ‘Man.’ It is this issue of the ‘genre’ of ‘Man’ that causes all the ‘–isms.’

Following Wynter’s understanding of race and gender as two genres of overrepresentation, I take racialized gender as a term that names the imbricated processes whereby biopower renders bodies socially meaningful based on what they are (self-possession) and what they can do (self-determination). As Roderick Ferguson and other scholars have importantly noted, gender and sexual difference make racial formations variable and gender and sexual normativity function as primary anchors for racialized violence. In addition, taking race and gender together in their genre function lends itself to seeing how heteropatriarchy polices gender and sexuality through racialization as well. Following this line of thought, the overrepresentation of Man helps us see the way questions about the social organization of gender already carry within them racial metrics even when explicit racial language is left out.

Because gender and race emerge as consequential bodily logics created out of the conditions of conquest and colonization that set the conditions overrepresentation of Man, we must keep them in the forefront of any critique of ability that recognizes the limits of able-embodiment. Wynter’s orientation to the genre work of gender and race as epistemological and ontological categories helps us see how they actually also operate beyond what we properly
understand as race and gender, and in fact structure biopolitical regimes that hierarchize ability and able-bodiedness. This helps us see the sometimes counter-intuitive way that even when not announced as such, the ready association of ability and social value occurs through the technologization of racialized gender. Relatedly, technologies of white supremacy and misogyny also rest on the legitimacy of ability as a primary index through which bodies are biopolitically evaluated and organized in and through the genre of racialized gender.

Given this dynamic, it is less effective to treat sexism, racism, and ableism as discrete structures of domination, but rather as the biopolitical articulations of what Wynter understands as modernist coloniality. Stuart Hall’s theory of articulation is particularly useful here for assessing the way this dynamic plays out in the realm of (physical) culture and specifically, in the twentieth-century cultural phenomena of women’s basketball. As Hall remarked in a well-known interview with Lawrence Grossberg:

A theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects. Let me put that the other way: the theory of articulation asks how an ideology discovers its subject rather than how the subject thinks the necessary and inevitable thoughts which belong to it; it enables us to think how an ideology empowers people, enabling them to begin to make some sense or intelligibility of their historical situation, without reducing those forms of intelligibility to their socio-economic or class location or social position.100

For my purposes, articulation is a useful analytic from which to understand how women’s basketball operates as a biopolitical technology. Women’s basketball emerges in the twentieth
century as a site of articulation, or “form of connection” of the imbricated forces of racism, sexism, and ableism as they flowed through U.S. liberal capitalism. As an embodied pursuit, women’s basketball was articulated differently across education, labor, and community spheres which served different groups of people. The modernist social forces and historical conditions of the overrepresentation of Man brought these articulations together under the rubric of athletic ability, and players and audiences used basketball as the means to engage, disrupt, and reconsolidate the terms of ability they inherited.

**Chapter Outline**

In the following chapters, I lay out how women’s basketball became a site of struggle around the overrepresentation and the overdetermination of racialized gender. Women’s basketball as not just one game, it was many games at once. By juxtaposing these many games, I reveal the dynamic cultural phenomena that became embedded in social pedagogy, industrial labor relations and urban place-making that together demarcate the relationship between athletic ability and racialized gender.

Chapter two explores the origin of women’s basketball between 1900 and 1920 and conducts a discursive analysis of Spalding and Wilson guides and rulebooks written by Senda Berenson, the inventor of women’s basketball and Dr. Dorothy Bocker, a leading educator and later the head physician at Margaret Sanger’s birth control clinic. I trace debates over proper administration and rules to show how the women’s game was differentiated from the men’s game on the grounds that it could be a eugenic technology of racialized personhood and national citizenship. What first appears as a form of gender policing or training is reconfigured in its ambitions for progress through the disciplining of racialized gender. Their investment in teaching women basketball reflected a desire to guide athletic ability as a means to secure white
reproductive heterosexuality within a framework of liberal feminism that simultaneously acknowledged women’s access to liberty but also proposed disciplinary measures to ensure a kind of physical training of the body appropriate to forms of modern white womanhood. Further, these advocates did not blindly accept the essentialism of gender vis a vis the sexed body. In acknowledging how basketball could cultivate physical and social fitness, they sought out modes of training and ritual that were intended to produce gender. Feminist leaning physical educators, at the interstices of women’s rights and social engineering, attempted to secure gender as a measure of racialized personhood. Their proposed game intended to produce an able-bodied reproductivity that was synonymous with civilizational progress at precisely the moment when new people groups were claiming access and mobility in the US nation-state. Yet, this goal was never truly achieved.

Chapter three explores how basketball moved out of educational contexts to engender athletic ability a form of labor for some industrial era women workers. I begin by reviewing the emergence of industrial athletics and their relation to dominant paradigms of economic efficiency through scientific management and corporate welfare. Labor unions and corporate employers both took an interest in the game. Then, I trace the outgrowth of increasingly competitive women’s basketball as a type of work in its own right. Focusing on workplace studies of industrial athletics and newspaper accounts of traveling exhibitionist barnstorming teams like the All-American Redheads and the Chocolate Co-eds, I explore the popularization of women’s basketball from 1920 to 1940 in industrial workplaces and later in mass leisure setting. I argue women’s athletic ability became linked to a flexible service based entrepreneurial kind of affective labor. This chapter addresses basketball in commerce to argue that industrial and barnstorming competition offered the recognition of women’s athletic ability as a form of labor
power (both productive and living labor) that was first biopolitically desired as a form of recreation to reproduce working ability and later as a service-based commodity intended for consumption in an emergent mass leisure economy. In detailing this trajectory, I contest a dominant narrative of economic transformation that characterizes the chronological shift in labor history from Fordism, and its cousin Taylorism, to Post-Fordism, otherwise understood as the industrial to post-industrial eras. I argue that industrial era women’s basketball troubles an over-simplified interpretation of the industrial era workers as entirely distinct from post-industrial labor relations and working conditions and instead I rely on Raymond Williams’s concept of “structures of feeling” to argue that emergent tendencies toward what we characterize as postmodern, post-industrial or post-Fordist can actually be observed within the industrial era women’s basketball. By reading basketball as “living labor,” I demonstrate how this accounting of women’s work helps elucidate the ideology of ability that undergirds both capitalist and even some prominent anti-capitalist orientations to the concept of labor.

Chapter four explores the variety of forces that shaped women’s basketball in one city in particular, Chicago. As an industrial hub for migrations, Chicago provides a rich case study in the ways women’s basketball became a type of place-making and refracted contemporary urban life in the early twentieth century. Using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping and spatial analysis to interpret the urban historical geography of women’s basketball between 1925 and 1940. Largely with the help of a large scale municipal recreation survey, I geocode almost fifty distinct locations culled from over one hundred Chicago Tribune and Chicago Defender news stories that reported on women’s basketball events. These sites are plotted over 1930 U.S. census demographic data. This historical geography reveals how different communities invested in girls and women’s basketball and for what reasons. My attention to spatial relationships
reframes the historiography of women’s sports as discrete sub-cultural activities into one more dynamically imbricated in the everyday life and in some of the city’s most popular landmarks. Through this mapping of venues allocated for the performance and consumption of athletic ability, I demonstrate how basketball entailed struggles over mobility and access to public space. Spaces of play, from armories to casinos to churches, both disrupt and reaffirm the limits of gender, class, ethnic and racial segregation in Chicago. The spatial order of the city relied on the segregation of people by race, class, gender, and ethnicity. Yet, basketball was an activity that brought different groups of people into contact, and its socio-spatial relations activated public spectacles for the contestation or disruption of racial and gendered social orders through competition across race and sex/gender categories. At the same time, these contests were limited in their ability to do so. Focusing on two armories, I chart these dynamics to argue that state sanctioned violence is contiguous to the leisure and spectatorship of basketball, not its opposite. Building on queer scholarship about racialized gender and sexuality in urban cultural publics, I frame women’s basketball as a “contiguous zone” to highlight how women’s able-bodied performance of race and gender directly influenced struggles over hierarchically organized urban publics. As a contiguous zone, women’s basketball grounded in particular locations created opportunities for disruption and resolution of dominant spatial and social orders.

The concluding chapter synthesizes the three prior chapters to summarize the ways that women’s basketball became a biopolitical technology that made athletic ability coherent through the embodiment of racialized gender. With respect to this dynamic, it also considers both the differences and continuities between the historical moment investigated and the contemporary moment we live in now. Building on Rey Chow’s argument that “technologized idealism” is the core characteristic of fascism, I explore the way contemporary sports convey technologized
idealism through a mandate of ability that is extremely palpable in present moment. Acknowledging the way athletic ability becomes valuable through biopolitical evaluation, I contend that the strongest argument we have for the social utility of sports should not be reduced to their representational value, or their ability to attach embodiment to economies of social value. The reiterated and embodied experience of playing basketball remains in surplus of the codes that grant it social value. While sports are surely outposts for technologized idealism, sports also contain the technologies for their demise. Paying attention to the beautifully irreducibly singular and yet shared experiences of being in the world “where thinking, sensing and understanding mutually enfold.” Here, the embodied experience of play remains in surplus of the codes that grant it social value. Sports do summon vital energies, this is why they transmit and reproduce biopower. Yet, this potential should not be parochialized to schemes of possession and productivity. Here, I turn away from pedagogies of discipline or the sensationalism of exhibited spectacle and conclude to consider how we might think differently about athletic ability.

Together the following chapters work to lay out the points of consolidation and contradiction that occurred within early twentieth-century women’s basketball. These chapters juxtapose different kinds of investment and value placed upon women’s athletic pursuits and demonstrate that women’s basketball had mass appeal. Some of the reasons for this overlap, like in the example of those who said it was a means for feminine restraint or worker docility. Others remain in contrast, like those who appreciated the way women’s basketball allowed for quite an unrestrained feminine comportment or affective excess. These juxtaposed chapter begin to piece together the heterogeneity of the game. Holding these pieces together and against one another reveals the way women’s basketball became both a technology of discipline and a technology of
disruption of the biopolitics of racialized gender. What follows is the start of a mosaic, surely unfinished but nevertheless coming into view.
Notes

1 Some prominent examples include non-profit organizations like Peace Players that provides “sport programming, peace education, and leadership development to those living in communities in conflict” and Women Win, which seeks to “to equip adolescent girls to exercise their rights through sport.”


3 Iris Marion Young, “Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality,” in On Female Body Experience: Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27–45. For example, Iris Marion Young argues that patriarchy influence gender differentiation at the level of embodied experience using the example of how girls and young women are socialized and conditioned to restrict their body movement.


5 Until 1920s the two word phrase “basket ball” was used. The one word basketball became more popular sometime during the mid-1920s.


12 Stuart Hall, “Race, Articulation, and Society Structured in Dominance” 1980. I also extend Stuart Hall’s theory of ‘overdetermination’ and ‘articulation’ found in “Marx’s Notes on Method: A Reading of the ‘1857 Introduction’” (126-128). My use of the concept of articulation is inspired by Stuart Hall’s understanding of different systems of domination that form a complex structure wherein discrete forms of relationality, here race, gender, and ability, are in fact expressed through and within one another in a modal function.


15 Michel Foucault, Society Must be Defended (New York: Picador, 2008), 8.

16 Foucault, Society, 9.


The 1918 Flu Pandemic infected over 500 million people and killed over 50 million. This was in part due to new advancements in mobility and travel as well as existing conditions of malnourishment and poor sanitation. It was, to date, the worst disease break in human history and had wide reaching cultural and social impact.

The return to normalcy was part of Warren Harding’s 1920 presidential campaign slogan and signaled the desire to return to the way life was before the crisis of the first world war.

Walter Galenson and Robert Smith, “The United States” *Labor in the Twentieth Century*, ed. John Dunlop and Walter Galenson. (New York: Academic Press, 1978), 11-84. According to Galenson and Smith, in the early twentieth century, women found work in the areas agriculture, domestic service, manufacturing, clerical and office work. US born middle and upper-class women dominated clerical and professional sectors. In manufacturing, women worked in textile and shoe factories. The majority of the US women’s workforce were immigrant and African American women. Millions of women left the home to enter the US workforce. In 1900, the unemployment rate was 5% and stayed below 10% with the exception of 1921 when it rose to 11.9% during a recession. During the Great Depression, however, the unemployment rate spiked to almost 25% in 1933 and did not come back down to single digits until the US entered World War II. Between 1900 and 1940, the percent of all women over 16 in the US workforce increased from 20.6% to 26.7%. Of those, single women jumped from 45.9% to 53.1% and married women doubled from 5.6% to 13.8%. In the same period, the average work week for manufacturing industries decreased from 55 hours to 37.6 hours per week. White collar jobs, those in the technical, managerial, clerical or sales setting, rose from 17.6% in 1900 to 31.3% in 1940. Agricultural jobs decreased overall but good producing industry increased from 37.8% to 41.6% of overall employment and the service industry grew from 24.1% 39.9% of all jobs.

Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). The exception to this trend was the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act.


Keith Myerscough, "The Game with no Name: The Invention of Basketball," 150. Myerscough documents the work Naismith’s first students did to bring the game to their own networks. For example, Myerscough notes students introduced the game with “the missionary zeal of the YMCA” to France, China, India, Japan, and Persia by 1900.


Mary Lynn McCree Bryan and Allen Freeman Davis, *One Hundred Years at Hull-House* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1990), 74.


For an entertaining and illustrative primer on the most famous pre-NBA barnstorming basketball teams, see Shoals, IndianChief, Rotkirch and Weinstein, *Undisputed Guide*, 20-25.

"Basket Ball: The Giant Strides in Favor Made by Basket Ball" *The Sporting Life* 69, no. 5, March 31, 1917.

The women’s game grew in parallel with the growing popularity of men’s basketball in both college and commercial environments. However, women only played against men in exhibition settings.


Critique and Reconstruction (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Mark Dyerson, Making the American Team: Sport, Culture, and the Olympic Experience (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Susan Brownell, The 1904 Anthropology Days and Olympic Games: Sport, Race, and American Imperialism (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2008); J. A. Mangan and Roberta J. Park, From 'Fair Sex' to Feminism: Sport and the Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras (London: F. Cass, 1987); Grant Farred, In Motion, at Rest: The Event of the Athletic Body (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014)

59 Neil Conner, Geography of Sports (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014). 1. Conner notes that, “scholars of sports and society have made the claim that, in today’s world, sports rather than religion should be considered the “opiate of the masses.” Yet, this paraphrase of Karl Marx’s famous statement does not completely capture the pervasiveness of sports within society.”

60 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment (New York: Continuum, 1994), 120.


62 It is important to note that much of this scholarship focuses on the experiences or examples of male athletes.


65 For examples, see: Karen DePauw, Disability and Sport (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1995); Nigel Thomas and Andy Smith, Disability, Sport, and Society: An Introduction (New York: Routledge, 2008).

66 For an example of this, see: David L. Howe, “Sport, the Body, and Technologies of Disability” in A Companion to Sport, eds. David L. Andrews, and Ben Carrington (New York, John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 210-222. Howe overviews major contributions in the sub-field of disability sports studies, but his summary generally renders able-bodied as a matter of fact quality of non-disabled athletes, there by not requiring much investigation as a social construct itself.


73 Garland Thomson, Extraordinary Bodies, 6.

74 Robert McRuer, Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 94. Building from Judith Butler’s notion of gender trouble, McRuer highlights “ability trouble” which
he understands as “meaning not the so-called problem of disability but the inevitable impossibility, even as it is made compulsory, of an able-bodied identity”.


76 Campbell, *Contours of Ableism*, 9, 14-15.


80 Kim Q. Hall, *Feminist Disability Studies* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 3. Ashley’s parents actively pursued medical procedures to stop her physical growth and the acquisition of secondary sex characteristics. Her parents and their supporters argued that this would improve her quality of life and make caring for her easier (3).


82 Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2013).


88 Foucault’s first mention of this concept came fleetingly at the end of *The History of Sexuality Volume I* and was later more deeply explored in a two-lecture series titled, *The Birth of Biopolitics, Security Territory Population and Society Must Be Defended*.

89 Foucault, *Society*, 241.

90 Starting in the 17th century, natural, biological, and human sciences began to use the concept of race as a means of organizing and differentiating groups of people; it functioned as a primary typology. Akin to the naturalist taxonomy of flora and fauna, the term *Homo sapien* positioned humans as a part of natural history, thus as natural physical creatures not only spiritually descended beings. While scientists differed in their classifications, there were more often a few racial groups distinguished by a similar few distinct geographically zones. Color, shape, size all became mechanisms to establish racial difference. By the advent of global modernity, race became a term to connote the natural divisions in humanity. These racial divisions were steadily attached to biological or essential traits as well as cultural or social capacities. Thus, race became a scientific concept or independent variable that could effectively predict dependent variables like mental and physical capacity. In the 18th century biological definitions of race were further legitimated by the growth of physical anthropology and natural history as well as the maturation of colonial empires. The apparatus of racial science gave epistemological support to white supremacist regimes of imperialism and civilization. Between the 1790s and 1890s, the Malthusian idea of population control, Darwinian principle of
natural selection and Francis Galton’s eugenics all influenced the growing influence of biopower on modern social relations. These scientific observations about nature were shortly thereafter applied to social and cultural life with the population science of eugenics. By the late nineteenth-century and the dawn of the twentieth-century Progressive Era, races signified naturally distinct groups of people and race loosely signified the entire human species. Sexuality was both the mechanism and the menace to the reproduction of these distinctions. Shifts in the orders of racial capitalism required new kinds of disciplinary technologies posited toward the management of bodies, spaces, and movement. The Progressive Era was a heightened time for anxiety, debate, and desire around both concerns over racial difference and gendered sexual agency.

91 Foucault, Society, 243.

92 Foucault, Society, 255.

93 Foucault, Society, 255.


95 For more on this, see: Lisa Lowe, The Intimacies of Four Continents (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 3. Lowe conducts an unsettling genealogy of liberal modernity that “examines liberalism as a project that includes at once both the universal promises of rights, emancipation, wage labor, and free trade, as well as the global divisions and asymmetries on which the liberal tradition depends, and according to which such liberties are reserved for some and wholly denied to others. In this sense, the modern distinction between definitions of the human and those to whom such definitions do not extend is the condition of possibility for Western liberalism, and not its particular exception.”


99 Roderick Ferguson, Aberrations in Black: Toward A Queer Of Color Critique (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Grace K. Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson, Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). This is one of the primary contributions of queer of color critique and analysis. This body of scholarship has emerged that considers how gender and sexuality serve as dense analytical sites for the study of racialization under global capitalism and pays particular attention to materialist analyses that emerge from queer of color positionality. These works offer critical tools to think about the production of such a cogent category as ‘queer people of color’ while resisting the reification or mystification of racialized difference. Moving the focus from difference to the differential advocates for a consideration of the points of contradiction and heterogeneity within queer of color critique which highlight the (ir)rationale of Western epistemologies and transnational capitalist political economy.


101 Campbell, Contours of Ableism, 15.
Chapter 2: Pedagogies of Racialized Gender in Early Basketball Governance

Introduction

Figure 1: “Goal” by Tom Thurlby

On August 14, 1920, the *Seattle Daily Times* published the political cartoon “Goal” drawn by cartoonist Tom Thurlby (see Figure 1). In the cartoon, a woman with a “Suffragists” sash and a “Tennessee” bandana shoots a basketball labeled “19th Constitutional Amendment” into a basketball hoop that is labeled “Ratification.” In mid-shot, she is guarded one on one by another woman with a sash labeled “Antis.” The suffragette wears bloomers while the anti-suffragette wears a more traditional dress garment. They appear as mirrored opposites, both
upward and outstretched one on offense and one on defense. The suffragist outstretched and in
the act of shooting is clear in action and intent, while the anti-suffragist jumps in an almost chair
pose. Her gaze is affixed to the ball as well as she looks on unable to intervene or change the
trajectory of the ball’s flight. The suffragette’s shot was made and the goal achieved only four
days later when, on August 18, 1920, Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify the 19th
amendment by a one-vote margin thereby securing a 3/5th majority needed to pass the
constitutional amendment at the federal level.

By 1920 Victorian ideals of womanhood had been upended in favor of the “New
Woman,” a figure associated with individual autonomy and public life. Athletic femininity had
become a fixture in popular culture, part and parcel of the “New Woman” identity. These parallel
associations between women’s athletic ability and political ability did not occur by chance. What
made basketball a ready metaphor for feminist suffrage? The choice could perhaps be attributed
to the game’s rising popularity among women and its increasing embeddedness in U.S. popular
culture as a form of physical education and recreation. In rhythm and style, the game became an
appropriate symbol for burgeoning twentieth-century US modernity and the social contests that
would characterize it. Thurlby’s cartoon illustrates this association. In the cartoon suffrage versus
anti-suffrage politics are laden onto women’s bodies and their bodies enact this political struggle
in the form of a one on one basketball competition. Yet, the fight for citizenship rights embedded
in the 19th amendment was not just for and between women, it revealed a much broader struggle
over racial formations at the heart of debates around citizenship and belonging in the nation-
state. Women’s basketball was not only useful as a metaphor or symbol for gendered social
progress, it was also thought to be useful as a technology for social progress by the physical
educators who invented it.
This chapter unpacks the social utility basketball was imagined to provide to modern US women and theorizes how physical educator pedagogy promoted women’s basketball as a disciplinary technology of racialized gender that could be applied toward the eugenic goal of civilizational progress. Women’s basketball was invented and then regulated to hinge liberal feminist calls for white women’s self determination to racial and national population control. Progressive Era physical educators fostered women’s basketball in an attempt to secure and automate the Color Line using bodily technologies in the service of racial and national calcification. In the midst of one of the most socially disruptive eras in US history, physical educators positioned basketball as a mechanism for tacit physical and social control while still supporting claims for women’s agency and gender self-determination. Optimistic about the potential of the game as a biopolitical technology, physical educators pursued governance over basketball in order to discipline the performance of femininity but also to secure the integrity of racial difference. They did this at a time when the hegemony of heteropatriarchy and white supremacy was being threatened by formerly disenfranchised political blocs.

For evidence to my claims, I assess physical education pedagogy of women’s basketball by analyzing two popular guides aimed at regulating women’s basketball. These are the Spalding’s Athletic Library *Basket Ball Guide for Women* edited by Senda Berenson in 1901 and a Wilson Sporting Goods publication *Basket Ball for Women: A Guide for Player, Coach, and Official* edited by Dorothy Bocker in 1920. These two guides are edited volumes that include short essays by leading physical educators in the movement to regulate women’s basketball. Relying on these training guides and concordant organizational efforts, I contextualize debates about risks and benefits of basketball to critically assess how efforts to standardize, regulate, and teach the game technologized gender as an index of racialized personhood. Following this, I
demonstrate how these discourses reiterate investments in particular epistemological and ontological regimes of racialized gender through the logic of athletic ability.

In these materials, I reveal the way prominent physical educators attempted to capture athletic ability and guide it as means to a proper womanhood that secured white reproductive heterosexuality. In these training guides, they argued that under their proper supervision, athletic ability could be mobilized in and through basketball to achieve the mental, emotional, and physical qualities necessary for civilizational progress. In the progressive ideology of physical education, educators saw themselves as a type of social engineer. For them, basketball functioned as an applied biopolitical technology that promised an automation of their vision for women’s progress. Physical educators saw basketball as an automating technology because it entailed collective embodied activity that called on physical habit and sensual feeling. It could increase health and prevent individualistic over-thinking. As such they argued the game could reiterate properly progressive ways of being that would arise “spontaneously, without conscious thought or intention.” This potential was both a danger and an opportunity to existing hegemony. Educators attempted to harness athletic ability as an ethical corollary to particular moral schemes even as the game itself outgrew these attempts.

In demonstrating this relationship between race, gender and (athletic) ability, I reorient existing accounts of early women’s basketball to suggest a more insidious biopolitical economy of racism undergirded this cultural phenomena. Previous historical accounts have primarily focused on the gendered ideologies of femininity that influenced this early twentieth-century development of this sport for women. For example, Joan Hult reviews the emergence of middle-class women’s leisure, as well as newly achieved arenas for white-collar women’s work that greatly influenced the distribution and development of women’s basketball pedagogy.
Spears explains how Senda Berenson’s life experience and training influenced her approach to women’s basketball instruction and rules. Joanna Davenport reviews the major rules changes espoused by Berenson and other educators that were alleged to preserve women’s safety and welfare. Nancy Cole Dosch further explains the medical debates that undergirded these claims. Steveda Chepka highlights the influence of the early feminist movement as well as the ideology of motherhood upon women’s basketball. In her assessment of the early guides and publications on women's basketball, Chepka writes “an unusual number of the articles under study sought to associate the participation of women in basketball with motherhood and morality.”

Motherhood was the teleological goal, or at least, the assumption at play in women’s basketball training. In this way, all girl and women participants were understood as potential future mothers and physical educators used this fulcrum to argue for the utility of basketball. These feminist historians have established that women’s basketball was fundamentally linked to the optimization of women’s biological reproduction and reproductive labor. In their book, *Shattering the Glass* Pamela Grundy and Susan Shackleforth provide valuable biographies of pioneer players and coaches who played beyond the confines of physical education realms. Their treatment of the early origins focuses more on actors and events than pedagogy discourse. The differential opportunities offered along the lines of race and class are conveyed by Grundy and Shackelford but the treatment of racial pedagogy is left relatively undiscussed.

When the question of racial difference is mentioned it arises as a supplement to the more immediate topic of women’s history and often as the recounting or the rectifying of a scarcity of published work on women of color teams. In later chapters, this project contributes to this important, ongoing work of historical documentation on the pursuits of women of color basketball teams. However, in this chapter I focus on the unacknowledged presence of race in
the pedagogical discourse of upper-class white women’s basketball, not the absence of women of color teams. By and large, the concept of race has been treated more topically than theoretically in the literature on early women’s basketball pedagogy. The concept of race has been taken as already understood to mean African American or other racially minoritized players and teams, not inclusive of white women. As such, these existing historiographies undertheorize the imbrication of race with gender at play in these physical education efforts. This topical treatment is not the same as actively theorizing the grounds of racial difference that structure the ontological claims to sex or gender difference, and through which gender discipline becomes crucial in the reproduction of racial hierarchy.

Therefore, to study these guides’ normative instructions in this context is to acknowledge how gender normativity and heteronormativity measured the integrity of racial distinctions. In this sense, I build on the important foundations laid by these feminist historians to explore the ways women’s basketball pedagogy positioned the game as not only a means to secure the physical and social difference between men and women but a way to secure the racial character of a national population. Sex segregation in sports manages and reproduces the boundaries of male and female, but in advocating women’s health and competition, it also works to secure racial boundaries. This is to say that debates over how women should be allowed to participate in sports were not discretely focused on the consolidation of gender and sexual difference but were also imbricated in larger concerns over the racialized abilities needed to produce progress.

**Origins and Popularization Meet Risk and Regulation**

Senda Berenson, a Smith College physical educator, was nicknamed “the Mother of Women’s Basketball” for her role as the inventor and major advocate for the women’s game. Senda Berenson was born Senda Valvroenski, to Lithuania Jewish parents in 1868 and
immigrated to Boston in 1875. She was troubled by illness and depression most of her life. At
the recommendation of a close friend and her physician, she turned toward physical education to
help alleviate her own health problems and enrolled in the Boston Normal School for
Gymnastics (BNSG) in 1890. Upon completion of her training in 1892, Berenson was hired at
Smith College when Smith’s sitting gymnastics teacher took ill. Shortly after joining Smith
College faculty, Berenson read the January 1982 edition of *The Triangle* which featured James
Naismith’s new game called basket ball. Given there were so few team games available to
women, she was immediately interested in basketball and sought to appropriate Naismith’s game
for the students of Smith College. Through the 1890’s the game spread throughout colleges,
secondary schools, and YMCA’s.

Berenson’s views about the social utility of basketball were similar to the positions
espoused by James Naismith. They both focused on athletic physical training as a mechanism for
social and moral discipline. Naismith and Berenson were members of a growing professional
class of Progressive Era social reformers. These reformers, who were sometimes referred to as
social engineers and moral stewards, directed their attention toward the perceived physical,
mental, moral, and spatial problems wrought by early twentieth-century social transformation. In
other words, they asserted a vision and agenda for progress that both lamented and attempted to
resolve the dysfunctions caused by urbanization, industrialization, and mass migrations. As
Martha Verbrugge writes, “physical educators taught twentieth-century Americans how “to do”
masculinity or femininity, whiteness or blackness, and other identities that biology supposedly
encoded.” They did so through the paradigm of physical training as a mechanism for discipline.

Naismith and Berenson were among the first generation of institutionally trained physical
educators who matriculated from normal schools and colleges after coursework in topics like
anatomy, physiology, anthropometry, and sanitary science. This new profession grew quickly at the turn of the twentieth century after institutionalization following the Civil War. During the Reconstruction Era, social scientific approaches to health and fitness became entwined, public education expanded, and states started to pass laws making physical education compulsory in schools. Physical education was first offered in public schools starting in 1855. The consequences of war provided stimulus for those concerned with national demographics and health to coordinate physical education programs. Physical education programs cropped up in high schools and colleges throughout the United States and with them so did professional organizations for physical educators, like the American Physical Education Association, founded in 1885. As opportunities for physical recreation expanded outside the realm of schools, educators like Naismith and Berenson started to include team sports and other athletics in their calisthenics curriculum. The physical education profession experienced increased support after World War I opened the door to more conversations over war’s deleterious effect on national fitness.

The emerging class of physical educators who advocated for women’s basketball joined the ranks of an early twentieth-century US feminist reformer movement deeply entrenched in the politics of both social engineering and individual autonomy. This predominantly white upper-class feminist movement was grappling with liberal ideologies of self-possession and citizenship. Guide editors like Senda Berenson and Dorothy Bocker accepted and even embraced the changing political and economic status of women. However, they both mobilized basketball as a disciplinary technology well suited to the task of guiding women’s physical, mental, and moral behavior in the midst these changes. They embraced the doctrine of women’s liberty but
developed a game that was thought to kindly regulate it, not through dogma or injunction but through the subtleties allowed through physical habit, muscle memory, and sensual feeling.

In 1901 Senda Berenson recounted basketball’s unexpectedly swift expansion, claiming “it is by far the most popular game that women play.” Berenson’s 1894 *Physical Education* article first introduced her project. In it, she describes her efforts to teach basketball at Smith, as well as the challenges and successes she encountered while so doing. Berenson opens her essay by summarizing popular sentiments regarding femininity and physicality:

Until very recent years, the so-called ideal woman was a small waisted, small footed, small brained damsel, who prided herself on her delicate health, who thought fainting interesting, and hysterics fascinating. Wider and more thorough knowledge has given us more wholesome and saner ideas. The fainting, hysterical maiden is now treated as a nervous patient, and in her place is put the flowing, happy creature who advocated strongly ‘Mens sana in corpore sano.” She does not go into athletics to outdo nor imitate her brother as some would have us believe. She does not run the danger of having professionalism creep into her athletics. She realizes more and more that by developing her body as a scientific and thorough means as her mind - making the former a means for the later – does she reach the highest development of true womanhood.

Here, Berenson reiterates that the Victorian Era’s “cult of true womanhood” was culturally replaced by the twentieth century’s “New Woman.” Through public philanthropy, college education, and white-collar jobs, upper-class women began to take more visible roles outside the home, often pursuing work or college and waiting longer to marry and start families. Berenson herself was an example of this. Working-class women and women of color were never afforded
access to Victorian Era domesticity, but through greater opportunities for waged labor they too experienced a shift in status.

Athletics and physical recreation for women were becoming more normalized and were also used to treat maladjustment in upper-class white women. For the upper-classes, delicate health and its incumbent conditions of fainting and hysteria, had been replaced by a medicalized pathology of nervousness. Berenson describes this shift using the figures of the fainting, hysterical maiden to the flowing, happy creature who ascribed to the maxim “mens sana in corpore sano,” a Latin phrase meaning “a sound mind in a sound body.” Breaking with the cultural association of ideal femininity and weakness, Berenson argued basketball, over and above other options like bicycling, swimming, track, and golf, was perhaps most appropriately suited to this goal of reaching “highest development” and allowing women to embrace their physical fortitude as a positive quality of civilized modern womanhood.

From the beginning, Berenson found it necessary to adapt Naismith’s rules to suit her constituency of Smith College women. This strategy sought to delimit opportunities for physical contact and to produce more appropriate forms of bodily comportment. Some major rule differences included the drastic restriction of movement through court segmentation, set positions, limited dribbling, shorter halves, the increase to between 6 and 10 players a side, and limited coaching. She served as a mentor to the following generation of women physical educators, coaches, and health administrators who became interested in women’s basketball. She made a number of changes to the original game. These included separating the court into three sections, assigning players reduced domains of movement, and limiting dribbles, steals, and player to player contact. All of these modifications were intended to produce a game more suitable for producing healthy modern women.
Women’s athletics were largely marginal to men’s and educators like Berenson were invested in articulating a particularity to women’s physical activity that functioned through the logic of sex difference. Many women educators argued their specific insights as women made them especially suited to take on the work of physically educating women. Joan Hult notes they articulated the moral duty to “exercise the same types of control over their charges that mothers might be expected to exert over their daughters.”\(^{18}\) This call for maternal governance solidified the distinction between men’s and women’s sports and established a viable niche for women educators by differentiating the goals and approaches between men’s and women’s physical activities. As historian Steveda Chepka writes, “women physical educators, already on the academic and cultural fringes, did not dare risk challenging the male domination of sport. Their alternative solution was to domesticate the game of basketball and keep it in the mainstream of social convention.”\(^{19}\) Their strategy proceeded through collaboration with organizations like the American Physical Education Association and the National Amateur Athletic Federation, and the Amateur Athletic Union. They formed committees and developed instructive training manuals in attempts to regulate, institutionalize, and govern a relatively varied game in practice, a game often played by men’s rules. This ‘domestication’ campaign was waged to differentiate the women’s game from the men’s game so as to locate women’s athletics within the confines of respectable femininity allowing a reform but not revolution in embodiment.

While started in upper-class white women’s colleges, basketball grew popular quickly and was transported to variety of settings, including industrial workplaces and mass exhibitions. This diffusion also meant variation in how the game was played. In part, this meant women’s basketball took on a life of its own beyond educator agendas. Different rules were used throughout the country, iterations of feminized modifications like Berenson’s as well as the
original men’s rules. This is evidenced by one Atlanta based high school girl’s retort, "I don’t like to play girls' rules, that is why I don’t want to play at GHS [Girl’s High School] They have to play girls' rules there, and Philia plays boys rules which is lots more fun...I really do wish GHS could play as the other girls teams do - very few of them stick to the old rules, and most of them like the boys rules way better .” Berenson lamented these drastic variations, stating “this has brought about great cause for dissatisfaction. Scarcely two institutions of education for women play with precisely the same rules.”

Unregulated and non-standardized play entailed great risks from the perspective of physical educators vying for governance over the game. The proliferation of the game was marked by heterogeneity within and amongst women’s basketball teams and the ways they played. In other words, women’s basketball had the potential to manifest both docile and disruptive bodies.

The persistence of unruliness and competition was problematic for two primary reasons: masculinization and damage to reproductive capacity. Historian Susan Cahn has noted “the fear of female sexuality unleashed from feminine modesty and male control runs like a constant thread through the history of women’s sport.” Cahn references two figures, the “damaged mother” and the “muscle moll” that embodied fears about “impaired reproductive capacity and incitement to sexual immorality.” She notes that “the damaged mother had to do with fears about the declining middle-class birthrate, while the muscle moll reflected anxieties about the sexuality active working woman. While Cahn notes that the muscle moll implied a kind of excessive heterosexuality, I would argue these educators feared not only possible sexual deviance but also gender deviance accrued on the body of the muscle moll herself.

Contrary to the idea that gender was largely understood as essential and natural in the early twentieth century, physical educators were acutely aware of the way gender was a dynamic
status that required securitization. Unregulated or improperly regulated basketball and the kinds of athletic ability it fostered presented the risk of deviance and ultimately a kind of gendered transition away from properly able-bodied womanhood. This could occur through gendered behavior or physiologic functionality. The two major risks, masculinization and loss of reproductive capacity, both amounted to a loss of heteronormative reproductive value. Masculinization was thought to occur not only physically through unsightly muscle growth but also emotionally through aggression and assertiveness. Relatedly, popular conservation theory reinforced the idea that biological economies relied on a limited amount of human vitality. One writer reported, "possibly excepting rowing, basketball is the sport that is hardest on women” as it caused too much nervous strain, over fatigue, and possible injury. Straining too much of that vitality playing basketball could mean less overall reserve for biological reproduction or it could mean an uncouth type of self-determination.

Women’s basketball had many detractors for these reasons. For example, on March 16, 1923, University of Pennsylvania psychology professor, former president of Drake University, YMCA director, and prominent pastor Arthur Holmes, gave a speech in Chicago at the Sunday Evening Club, a venue for religious lectures. The Washington Post reported on the event the next day in an article titled, “Women are Cheapened Imitating Men, He Says.” In the speech Holmes stated:

You hear a great deal about the emancipation of woman, I for one, am for it. I wish she would emancipate herself from a lot of her foolish notions, especially her obsession to imitate man...if women continue to imitate men, wearing men's clothes, training in men's military camps, playing men's games and parting their short hair on the left side, they will ultimately weaken and cheapen their sex. Women after all must have the good opinion of
men, and there is no better way to gain that than to be as feminine as possible. Basketball is the worst game ever invented for the growing girl. Women are better off playing solitaire or bridge.

Holmes’ reconfigures the desire for women’s emancipation as an obsessive desire to imitate men. This improper desire weakens and cheapens the value of women, which for Holmes is primarily accumulated through the recognition of a pleasing feminine comportment by and for men. Holmes’ recognizes basketball as a game that could enrapture young women with these fantasies of imitation. His counter proposal of solitaire or bridge is significant as a retort against the group physical play aspects of women’s basketball, the same ones that were espoused as social goods by other physical educators and reformers who embraced first wave feminism in various ways.

Harvard professor Dr. Dudley Sargent provided a detailed and sensational illustration of girl athletes gone awry in a 1912 article for Ladies Home Journal:

A positive menace to the continuance of basket ball as a sane and rational game is its tendency to become so rough, fast, and furious as to be highly injurious to the health and morals of both players and spectators. The hard floor, brick walls, restricted area, crowded room, vitiated air, and close proximity of the excited partisans watching the game, all tend to develop an unnatural strain and tension which our high-strung youth too quickly respond. Is it a wonder that overworked hearts, congested lungs, crippled limbs, exhausted nervous systems and irritable tempers have frequently resulted from this force and unnatural style of play? Sargent describes a scene that is injurious to player and spectator alike. It is one with poor ventilation, confined crowds, and unnatural strain. In the same essay, Sargent, who later
contributed to Berenson’s 1916 Spalding Guide, credits the adoption of Berenson’s rules as the stabilizing force behind the women’s game. He summarizes, “this barbaric rudeness, ill temper and unsportsmanlike conduct was largely eliminated by adopting what is known as the “line game” and the regulations prohibiting all running, tackling, holding or personal interference with the player having the ball.”  

Barbaric rudeness in the form of unrestrained emotion could be prevented using Berenson’s modifications. This barbarism carried racial and class undertones, but appropriate rules could delimit it.

Berenson also acknowledged these risks, writing “just as basket ball may be made an influence for good so may it be made a strong influence for evil” and cautioned that “since all new movements swing from the extreme of degeneracy or inertness to the extreme enthusiasm of newly acquired powers, unless we are most careful we shall allow that enthusiasm and power to run away with our reason.” Berenson and others argued that standardized regulation ensured “clean sport and good spirit gained wherever basketball has been guarded by careful rules and strict discipline.” The game had to be protected from barbarism and degeneracy but secured with reason in order to most effectively mobilize athletic ability in the service of disciplining racialized gender in ways that would support liberal eugenics. Unregulated basketball could produce deviant gender, sex, and sexuality. When played incorrectly, the game threatened to manifest overly-assertive, brutish women who wanted to imitate or to be like men. Or, it could accidentally threaten reproductive capacity thereby creating dysfunctional sex. Or, by engendering the highly influential feelings of physical self-possession, basketball could foster poor decision making in realm of sexual agency and therefore, a sexuality unconducive to progressive eugenics.
In this way, these fears about gender, sex, and sexuality can be contextualized in anxieties founded on beliefs about the racial character of the nation. As white women entered higher education and the labor force, concern over the changing national demographic was articulated through a crisis of declining birth rates. In a 1905 speech, sitting president Theodore Roosevelt stated:

There are many good people who are denied the supreme blessing of children, and for these we have the respect and sympathy always due to those who, from no fault of their own, are denied any of the other great blessings of life. But the man or woman who deliberately foregoes these blessings, whether from viciousness, coldness, shallow-heartedness, self-indulgence, or mere failure to appreciate aright the difference between the all-important and the unimportant,—why, such a creature merits contempt as hearty as any visited upon the soldier who runs away in battle, or upon the man who refuses to work for the support of those dependent upon him, and who though able-bodied is yet content to eat in idleness the bread which others provide. The existence of women of this type forms one of the most unpleasant and unwholesome features of modern life. Roosevelt and others called this voluntary and deliberate forgoing of child-rearing “race suicide.” Race suicide, as well as the circulating propaganda of white slavery, both laid blame for poor national health on white women. These white supremacist fears laid the context for progressive physical education.

Physical educators, especially led by those affiliated with elite institutions like Smith, Oberlin, and others, waged a campaign over rules and regulations in an effort to secure docility. As the game became more popular for college women, intercollegiate competition came under scrutiny. Educators understood femininity as closely related to physical restraint.
and the unruliness it inspired threatened this restraint. As Jamie Schultz notes, “Physical education leaders were not, as many interpret ‘anticompetition’. Rather, they advocated for a tempered approach that would not violate culturally sanctioned understandings of femininity.”

Through organizations like the National Amateur Athletic Federation, physical educators campaigned to ban intercollegiate play in favor of less competitive intramural play days which encouraged broad student participation and discouraged male spectatorship.

These struggles over intercollegiate, competitive sport also played out in African American colleges but in different ways. Physical educators were largely successful because, over time, women’s intercollegiate competition faded into oblivion. Grundy, Nelson and Dyreson write, “most institutions of higher education, from coeducational state universities to private women’s colleges to historically black institutions, reacting to a variety of factors ranging from traditional sexism to financial pressures to lobbying from female physical educators to bar intercollegiate athletics” decided to end their women’s basketball programs.

Sketching out these debates about whether women should play basketball and how, a few different things become clear. Firstly, girls and women played basketball in a variety of ways. Across the country different styles of play and rules became more or less popular. Notably, men’s rules were already widely accepted. This lack of uniformity also generated argument and debate over how physical educators could shepherd the game and extend considerable cultural influence. The publication of training guides provided a means to spread the gospel and provide the ideological infrastructure to standardize the game. These guides devoted to teaching women’s basketball reveal the intersection of race, gender and ability that come to set the terms for reformer definitions of progress within the Progressive Era.
The Significance of Basketball for Women in 1901

From June 14 to 28, 1899, the Conference of Physical Training with the theme “Physical Training in the Educational Curriculum” was held at the International YMCA Training School in Springfield, MA. At this conference, a Committee of Fifteen was established to oversee the professionalizing field of physical education. At this same conference, discussion ensued amongst mostly female physical educators over the administration of women’s basketball. This led to the formation of a Women’s Basket Ball Rules Committee who would take on this task to establish uniform rules and regulation.\(^3\) The Committee recommended a number of actions in its report. They included a *Spalding's Athletic Library* publication of a set of rules alongside articles discussing the women’s game to be overseen by Berenson as editor of the project. This project came to fruition and was published under the title *Basket Ball for Women* in October, 1901.

The first 1901 edition was about 60 pages long. In addition to instructional photographs and advertisements for sporting goods, it included three editorials in addition to Berenson’s own editorial commentary and her presentation of rules. They were an “Official Note” by Dr. A. Bertha Foster, who was Chairman of the 1899 conference appointed committee; an essay titled “Psychological Effects of Basket Ball for Women” Dr. Luther Gulick; and another essay by Theodore Hough titled, “Physiological Effects of Basket Ball for Women.” Hough was a physician, scientist, and author of *The Human Mechanism; Its Physiology Hygiene and the Sanitation of Its Surroundings.* Berenson went on to edit the annually published guide for almost twenty years and with each later edition added commentary pieces by leading figures in physical education.\(^4\)

In one essay of the 1901 guide, “The Significance of Basket Ball for Women,” Berenson declares that “woman’s sphere of usefulness is constantly widening” resulting out of arguments
and evidence for the equality of the sexes in education and industry.\textsuperscript{40} She states that all fields of labor and professions are being opened to women and as such, women, now more than ever before, “need physical and moral courage” to meet these new opportunities with success.\textsuperscript{41} This is precisely the social utility basketball was imagined to provide over and above all other women’s sports, most of which were expanding at this time. Berenson claimed that basketball was unique in its capacity to provide women the kind of moral and physical training. She wrote:

Basket ball is the game above all others that has proved of the greatest value to them.
Foot ball will never be played by women, and base ball is seldom entered into with spirit.
Basket ball is played with deep earnestness and utter unconsciousness of self. Certain elements of false education for centuries have made woman self-conscious. She is becoming less so, but one finds women posing even in tennis and golf. It is impossible to pose in basket ball. The game is too quick, too vigorous, the action too continuous to allow any element to enter which is foreign to it. It develops quick perception and judgment—in one moment a person must judge space and time in order to run and catch the ball at the right place, must decide to whom it may best be thrown, and at the same time must remember not to "foul." It develops physical and moral courage, self-reliance and self-control, the ability to meet success and defeat with dignity...Success in this game can be brought about only by good team-play...This develops traits of character which organization brings; fair play, impersonal interest, earnestness of purpose, the ability to give one's best not for one's own glorification but for the good of the team—the cause.\textsuperscript{42}

For Berenson, basketball was not afflicted with the same elements of self-consciousness and posing for the male gaze as other women’s sports. In her perspective, its pace and modern rhythm does not allow for extended bouts of narcissism or self-consciousness. Berenson pairs an
argument for self-control alongside her contributor’s focus on team play. In fact, basketball at once enhances the capacity of self-reliance and self-control and puts these qualities in service of self-sacrifice for a greater collective good. By participating in basketball, women should not learn to glorify themselves but the larger cause, which is inextricable from contemporary desires for social progress.

In Berenson’s 1901 guide, a complimentary essay by Dr. Luther Gulick engages the psychology of team play “upon some of the more fundamental matters concerning the nature of woman and her place in our civilization.” Luther Gulick was a leader in the growing physical education profession. He held a number of leadership positions in physical education organizations as well as the fast growing YMCA. After becoming the founding superintendent of physical education at the International YMCA Training School, where he became Naismith’s supervisor and mentor, he went on to spread the gospel of men’s and women’s basketball to national and international audiences. A leading proponent of the play and playground movement, Gulick wrote elsewhere that play was the best evidence of an individual’s character as well as the best point of intervention for character development. Gulick explored the role of play in the “preserving the social inheritance of the race.” The teamwork and play offered in women’s basketball thus held political importance not only for the players, but for all those who would enter into relation with them.

Gulick argued that the chief psychological benefit of basketball is its ability to train women in teamwork. In his essay, titled “Psychological Effects of Basket Ball for Women,” he goes on to establish that team work, or the subordination of self-interest for the interests of the group, is of a higher mental and moral order than individual play, requiring altruism and “loyalty to a larger unit than self.” He notes that this loyalty was not unlike the “tribal loyalty of early
savage life” which allowed more advanced tribes to “conquer those who were still on the individual plane.” However, Gulick also writes, “games demanding team-play are played by Anglo-Saxon peoples, and by these peoples alone, and may thus be said to be a differentiating characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon adolescent male.” While Gulick’s claim was hardly true, he associates the team play as a quality of civilized whiteness. Amongst these Anglo Saxon peoples, he writes, “it is more difficult to get women to do team-work than it is to get men to do so.” He reasons that teaching teamwork through basketball would provide a novel education in getting women to work together, and thus, teaching them the mores of group-based identity. Why would this be important at the current juncture into a new century? In similar sentiment to Berenson, he writes:

We are in a time of great unrest in regard to the status of woman. She is entering many lines of work that hitherto have been carried on entirely by men...Whatever may be the outcome of this time of unrest, there certainly must grow among women a kind of loyalty to each other, of loyalty to the groups in which they naturally are formed, that is greater than obtains at present. Loyalty to the team and the playing of team-work appears to me to be no mean factor in the development and expression of this quality upon which our civilization rests.

The great unrest in regard to the status of women names the withering of Victorian Era womanhood and the entrance of middle-class and upper-class women into the workforce and public life more generally. Gulick, in liberal progressive form, does not lament this unrest, but rather accepts it as a coming tide. Instead of debating whether this changing tide was good or bad, he highlights the benefits of teamwork for developing women’s loyalty to nation and community. As they entered lines of work and citizenship rights previously held only by men,
they needed to acquire social skills not learned in their roles as wives and mothers, and not associated with kinship. They needed to learn civic loyalty.

Berenson and Gulick both espouse a kind of liberal feminist sisterhood in their arguments. They argued that basketball supported self-reliance, self-control, and team work. Without prior training in how to wield individual autonomy, reformers like Gulick and Berenson worried that women, outside of their traditional domestic roles, would disrupt the group bonds that upheld social division in the US. At the same time, they embraced the emerging historical harbinger of women’s rights and liberty. As reformers, they sought to guide women toward productive types of behavior that would strengthen communal bonds based on exclusion. This rudimentary form of feminist sisterhood fostered by basketball’s team work could allow women to more easily work in concert with one another but would also consolidate social divisions. The expression of women’s teamwork was thus a necessary corollary to women's liberty in the political economy of US nation state. They each provide rhetoric on women’s natural tendencies, contemporary shifts in what constitutes a woman’s place in US society, and arguments for basketball’s utility based on these facts. They acknowledge liberty as women’s personal property, articulating the desire to carefully guide, inspire, or rehabilitate instead of a demand to control and prohibit. At the same time, they consider the degenerational effect women’s liberty might have on the greater social body, a population segmented by the biopolitics of white supremacy and nativism.

The Significance of Basketball for Women Twenty Years Later

Dorothy Bocker’s 1920 edited volume *Basketball for Women: A Guide for Player, Coach and Official* was sponsored and published by Chicago based *Wilson Sporting Goods*. It includes only three advertisements, one for the company as a whole, one for Wilson intercollegiate
basketballs, and one for women’s bathing suits. Wilson sold the guide for 35 cents each and advertised that it should be “on every reading room table and in the hands of every girl athlete.” This guide is more narrative in form but also includes a number of instructional photographs. In lieu of a constitution of rules like the one presented by Berenson, Bocker instead reports advice, drills, and sample plays. Bocker’s guide tone reflects the popularization of the game as it is geared somewhat more toward coaches with teams than educators seeking to employ it within a physical education class. Where Berenson’s guide presents a constitution type document of rules with sidebar notations for referential ease, Bocker’s text reads more like a manual or book intended for coaches and people with authority over team activities. Bocker provides more of her own writing in her guide than Berenson did. With more than sixty pages of overall text, her voice is the most central one with only a few supplemental essays. Bocker’s 115 page guide includes rules and appropriate training practices in narrative form alongside supplemental essays by other authors. Together these authors address the use of basketball in schools, colleges, recreation centers, at workplaces, as well as the next generation of players who will become coaches.

Less is known about the origin of Bocker’s editorship. The guide states “in addition to her skills as an expert player and her work as a successful coach, Dr. Bocker has the additional advantage of medical training.” Bocker was indeed a medical doctor trained at Long Island Medical College and certified in pediatrics. At the time of the guide’s publication in 1920 Bocker held a position as medical director at the Georgia Normal and Industrial College. In addition, she is listed as the Director of Physical Education for Women at Ohio State University, Director for Women at Battle Creek and Idaho State Normal Schools, and Instructor at Columbia University Physical Education. By 1921 she had become Director of Georgia’s Division of Child Hygiene. In 1922, Bocker moved to New York to accept her friend Margaret Sanger’s offer to
become the primary doctor in the newly established Clinical Research Bureau, the functional arm affiliated with Sanger’s American Birth Control League.  

Like Berenson’s 1901 guide, Bocker’s 1920 book also responded to the increasing popularity of women’s basketball across the United States and well beyond the confines of education. Bocker writes, “Basket ball is known in the east and west, in the north and south; welcomed with joy everywhere played with zeal and benefit by thousands of women.” In the guide’s introduction, Emmett Angell, author of a Wilson’s men’s basketball guide, laments “there are influences in the game today that are detrimental. In some sections of the country, coaches with inadequate knowledge of the lessons taught by physiology and hygiene teach the game to women in accordance with the rules laid down for men. This is distinctly unwise, and coaching by the incompetent to the physical welfare of many girls.” Here, Bocker’s purpose and goal is made clear, to redirect these detrimental effects and the counter the degeneracy of the women’s game which had already become inconceivably popular across the country.

Bocker’s background in the playground movement, children’s public health as well as her later association as the American Birth Control League physician provides insight into her understanding of women’s health and the way it inflected her approach to women’s basketball pedagogy. In summary, she calls “basket ball is a game par excellence for women” due to “its effect on the physical and mental health, causing all the organs of the body to work in harmony and at their maximum efficiency, keeping work and play in proper proportion, giving discipline, grace and relaxation, and eliminating self-created phantoms of illness—giving health, strength, and joy.” For Bocker, overall women’s health was represented by the holistic coordination of rational mind, bodily grace, and controlled emotion.
For Bocker and many others, harmonious health that was part and parcel with mental and moral discipline and in this way in was bound up in historical changes for women around their political, sexual, social and economic agency. With respect to the physical demands on modern women, Bocker notes that "Women have been limited by social customs, their dress and deportment to small movements of the accessory muscles, such as sewing and piano playing. In basket ball the use of the large fundamental muscles in free, sweeping motion stimulates the circulation, relieves nervousness, morbidity and introspection, and tends to make for nervous stability and poise." Nervous stability was increasingly seen as threatened by modern civilization which promoted too many opportunities for women’s introspection, anxiety, and maladjustment understood as pathology of nerves. For this modern aliment, Bocker suggests that mental and emotional strength to withstand modern life could be developed through basketball.

In addition, Bocker draws particular attention to the important time of adolescence for physical and mental health. This corresponds to the expansion of women’s basketball into high schools. She notes that outside of birth, adolescence is the time of most bodily change. She writes, “The body shows remarkable increase in all directions, but this increase is not limited to the body, for all physical phenomena have their mental counterpart. The emotions increase in a queer, lop-sided fashion which seems inexplicable. Imagination, the fighting instinct, chivalry, and the clan spirit, all appear at puberty.” Basketball developed from a college game into a game enjoyed by youths and adults alike. For Bocker, the onset of puberty and the time of adolescence signal an entrance into womanhood. The physical capacity for sexual reproduction also grows in accordance with these “queer, lop-sided” emotions. Bocker finds the transition from girlhood to womanhood an especially vulnerable time in the development of mental and emotional resilience. She states:
With the majority of girls, due to poor training, traditions based on misconceptions, insistent and misdirected maternal solicitude and an encouraged introspection, the menstrual function has become a psychosis. The objective character of basket ball, the substitution of real problems for imaginary ones, and the joy of accomplishment found in basket ball, tend to replace real gods for false ones, and so help to solve one of the difficulties of physical education instructors, as well as to keep the girl's ideas and tendencies balanced, and to give her a proper sense of values.\textsuperscript{63}

The nervous introspection that causes psychosis around menstrual cycle can be alleviated through basketball practice as it grounds adolescent girls in an objective and construction external activity, taking them outside of themselves in the service of a hygiene and health.\textsuperscript{64}

Bocker promises that “training, if properly handled, results in a healthier girl, a stronger, more skillful, more graceful, more intelligent girl, and in basket ball which is speedy, scientific, clean and efficient.”\textsuperscript{65} Physically, women could achieve grace and poise, an ease and efficiency of movement through the use of large muscle groups in basketball. With large free motions, basketball was seen to stimulate respiration, blood circulation, and lymph flow and had the effect of “increasing working ability and the ability to ward off disease.”\textsuperscript{66} Due to repetitive bending of the trunk, basketball could reduce visceroptosis, the sinking of abdomen muscles, sometimes caused by corsets.\textsuperscript{67} Health was not just properly working organs and body parts, but the proper cooperation of multiple body systems to achieve optimum physical efficiency, or fitness, one that was aesthetically feminine even when athletic.

Further, she states, “a proper training in basket ball should give...better control of the mind over the body. The mind acts out, with the body as an instrument, suggestions which it has received...Basket ball should tend to a better and closer connection of mind and body and a
quicker and more ready obedience of body to mind.”

Even more succinctly, she notes “logical thought in a given direction finds culmination in basket ball. Imagination, independence, clan spirit, chivalry, all find a happy hunting ground in basket ball.” While Bocker articulates the ultimate goal of shaping minds and the sublimation of bodily desire to mental fortitude, she nevertheless affords primacy to the body as the catalyst in this circuit. Bocker privileges the physical training that achieves mental stability and emotional endurance without being too theoretical or confined to the world of the mind. In this way she appreciates the somatic effect basketball could have in securing ideological hegemony. She writes:

Mentally, training aims at cultivating constructive imagination, judgment, reasoning, resourcefulness, initiative, and speedy reaction to stimulus...There is no sitting down with pencil and paper and figuring out a line of conduct, there is no philosophizing about the value of resourcefulness, and so on, there are no wordy discussions upon the cultivation of initiative there is simply learning the particular virtues in an inductive manner, using them instantaneously when those qualities are needed.

For Bocker and her peers, the relatively unmediated nature of basketball as a form of training, was particularly effective given its inductive rather than deductive nature. These physical educators grasped the primacy of collective affect and ritual in achieving their political goals. When properly conducted, basketball builds moral character from the ground up, using the sensuous body to train the cognitive mind. She lauds basketball’s inductive ability alongside what she sees as its capacity for “light hearted joy.” This emotional exuberance was strongest because it was shared amongst players. As a team sport, Bocker reiterated Gulick’s earlier sentiments about the value of teamwork, noting it could generate qualities such as social cooperation, consideration of others, loyalty, allegiance, and steadfastness, mutual sympathy and
joy, all of which were important to maintaining group and collective identity. Yet, Bocker also resists the charge of mindless group think and possible fascism fostered in group membership when she writes, “the constant subservience of the individual to the group does not mean a blind obedience to rule in all phases of society, our environment shapes our activity and to raise ourselves we must raise our environment. So progress is made.” Here, subservience is morally and ethically fortitudinous because it is anchored in health and progress, two things that were unquestionably good for both individuals and overall society.

Limited muscular and nervous training improved endurance, hygienic activity and reproductive vitality. Mental efficiency, adaptability, timeliness, rational decision making, were valued traits for women as potential workers and household managers in an economy characterized by new opportunities of women’s work and consumption. Grace and poise allude to a feminine comportment that signaled the representation of a proper gender performance closely aligned with middle-class respectability. For physical educators, basketball offered an embodied ethical training in proper morals and values that was imagined to insulate the individual from bad instincts and the teamwork element offered practice in the kinds of collective identity essential to community cohesion that women were meant to uphold and reproduce for future generations.

One of the most telling passages in Bocker’s guide occurs when she describes the importance of team work for the social and political challenges of the day, particularly as they relate to the future of democracy and liberal capitalism in the United States. Bocker reiterates the fear and desire espoused by Berenson and Gulick almost 20 years prior, gender equality as a potential threat to the integrity of US national and racial formations, and the use of basketball to alleviate this possibility. Bocker states:
The world war has shown what all anti-democratic ideas are worth, whether those be of the ancient, cultured rulers of Europe or of the spontaneous combustion "reds." The individualism of women, if women really take their places in society as the equals of men, is as dangerous to society as are the autocracy of Germany or the bolshevism of Russia. Women have been made to feel that they are the guardians of the race, the altars of purity and innocence, and that their function was to keep these altars undefiled, not as a large, clear flame in a tabernacle, extending over the earth, but as little and individual as the household lares and penates of the Romans. In their ultimate analysis, governments are but groups of individuals gathered together for mutual protection and profit. In the team we see a replica of early government the team working toward a definite end, using all the judgment, reasoning, imagination, loyalty, fair-mindedness, obedience, self-confidence, skill and co-operation which its members can muster.

Bocker alludes to the way basketball can continue to teach women how to embrace their individuality in ways that support the goals of liberal democracy as well as the dangers involved if they do not. In this assessment, women’s individuality, particularly individual agency or possessive individualism, is as dangerous to American democracy as dictatorship or communism. Twenty years later, Bocker echoes Berenson and Gulick’s concern over the emerging problem of women’s civic, political, and sexual autonomy. Like Berenson before her, she mobilizes women’s vitality and physical fitness as part and parcel of ideal womanhood not as an aberration from it. At the same time, she articulates disdain for the limited imaginary of women as “guardians of the race.” Their guardianship had theretofore been delimited to the household and family. But now, with full citizenship, their influence could extend more broadly throughout the public and national sphere as a tabernacle, mobile and pacific in reach. Bocker
does not contest the association of women as guardians of the race. Instead, she reimagines the extent of this guardianship in the context of global geopolitics on the heels of World War I.

**Pedagogies of Racialized Gender and Athletic Ability**

Four major discursive themes arise across these women’s basketball guides. These are exemplified in the passages I have presented. Berenson, Gulick, and Bocker consistently articulate the need for continued civilizational progress in the face of the socially degenerative effects caused by urban industrialization and labor migrations. These physical educators argue for regulation over women's basketball to insulate womanhood from masculinization or reproductive dysfunction. They claim that their proper administration of the game ensures the optimization of physical vitality as a feature of ideal womanhood. The authors consistently reference women’s changing role in society and they implicitly support a liberal feminist perspective on women's autonomy and empowerment within this context. They recognized social change as bringing increased opportunity but also added responsibility requiring self-discipline towards self-sacrifice. They argued that basketball, as a collective physical ritual, offers a preeminent affective training in how to guide this newfound individual autonomy into self-governance for a greater cause. This cause is expressed as a progressive securitization of the future through women’s racial stewardship. Progress was understood as an outcome of the necessary acts of guardianship and governance to secure civilization. Here, civilizational progress is a measure in magnitude of vitality that takes place over the racialized time and space of US nation-state making.

These four themes, civilizational progress, liberal governance, and optimized vitality, racial guardianship, reiterate investments in particular epistemological and ontological regimes of racialized gender that set the limits of self-determination and agency as political concepts. All of
these facets of basketball’s utility allude to the way it shored up athletic ability as a measure of biopolitical value that was suitable to the demands of women’s liberty, a demand that was already cut up by the politics of race. Thus, physical educators posited women's basketball as a gendered technology that could harness athletic ability so as to optimize a eugenic order built on the hierarchy of white able-bodied reproductivity.

An explicitly biopolitical frame better accounts for the way women’s basketball became a gendered technology in the process of racialization. This represents a shift away from thinking about racialization as a process that only effects non-white ethnicities toward thinking about racialization as a more insidious biopolitical process. Here, following the work of Denise da Silva and Sylvia Wynter, I understand the process of racialization as fundamentally structuring all claims to legible personhood which are undergirded by liberal humanist notions of autonomy and agency. In particular, da Silva problematizes the construct of self-determination in distinction to environmental, or outer determination, which functions as a prerequisite of liberal humanist thought. As presented in chapter one, Wynter understands the construction of the human as a social and scientific subject as derived through Western epistemology and the racialized violence of conquest and colonization. While these authors write about the long arc of modern history, these global historical processes of racialization erected the Color Line, or what W.E.B. Du Bois’s called “the problem of the Twentieth Century.” This is not a simple binary of black people and white people, rather it names the way that distinctions of worthy human life and unworthy life are understood in a “racial grammar” rooted in the logic of white supremacy.

In this vein, women’s basketball enfolds within the “sociopolitical processes of differentiation and hierarchization which are projected onto the putatively biological human
body” that mark out terrains of acceptable forms of life and death with a racial grammar.” The fact of race was an outcome of epistemologies of racial difference and naturalized hierarchy, not the grounds for it. In order to understand the consequences of this racial grammar, it is necessary to engage the way gender and sexual difference provide syntax for the integrity of racial and national difference.

In addition, a biopolitical understanding of the way educators deployed basketball as a technology accounts for the role or function of gender as an index, or a mode of expression, of racialized personhood. This differs from an approach to gender as a parallel system of power, and instead requires a conceptualization of racialized gender. This represents a turn from focusing on race and gender as discrete systems of hierarchy to assessing how the differential processes of racialization occurs through the discipline and performance of gendered ability, which produces the very materiality of gender. Following this line of thought, in this historical case, we see gender operating as an index of racialized personhood, not as a discrete axes of power. By index, I mean the way gender, as a phenomenon that is both attributed and performed, operates as a “sign, token, or indication” of both race and sex difference. As an index, gender works like “a pointer which moves along a graduated scale (or which is itself fixed while a graduated scale moves across its extremity) so as to indicate movements or measurements.” The disciplining of gender is inherently biopolitical in the way it hinges race and sex as the primary caesura of vitality.

Ultimately, racialized gender set the governing limits for how modern athletic womanhood became legible and desirable in the twentieth century. This is significant because the category of womanhood has also been the reproductive terrain where nation based formations are both consolidated and disrupted. Feminist scholars Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis
highlight five major ways that women specifically participate in the reproduction of ethnic or national belonging:

(a) as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities; (b) as reproducers of boundaries of ethnic/national groups; (c) as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture; (d) as signifiers of ethnic/national differences - as a focus and symbol in ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction, and transformation of ethnic/national categories; (e) as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles.

Anthias and Yuval-Davis elucidate the figurative and material role women have in the reproduction of national integrity and group-based identity. Thus, to regulate racialized gender is also to shore up the limits of national formations. Given the integral work women do for and within national formations, calls for women’s rights and autonomy are not only threats to existing gendered social orders within a community, but also the very integrity of the community itself. So, while women’s basketball pedagogy attempted to discipline modern womanhood, the reason for this discipline was not just to uphold differences between men and women, but to ensure a desirable racial character among the national population.

The early twentieth-century US women’s suffragist struggle for women’s rights, namely for rights to political representation, public life and sexual autonomy, was bound up in anxieties over what that autonomy would mean for the reproduction of a US society deeply divided by class and race difference. As evidenced in Angela Davis’ seminal work *Women, Race and Class*, liberal feminist approaches to women’s gendered and sexual agency are better understood when located in relation to processes of racialization. In step with Davis, a number of women of color feminist and feminist disability studies scholars have called attention to the intersection of liberal
feminist reformer projects and the ideologies of eugenics and population control. In their critiques, these authors have demonstrated how liberal feminist arguments for women’s self-determination often relied on eugenic appeals to racial improvement as a metric for national health. Whereas heteropatriarchal eugenicists held the position that women’s emancipation had a negative and disordering effect on racial and national health, liberal feminists and allied reform minded physical educators argued that women’s emancipation was good for society because if women could chose, they could be taught to make better choices thereby securing more progressive futures.

However, this right was not an inalienable one, it was calculated on the basis of racial fitness. This connection can be seen most obviously in the slide into support for sterilization of the unfit that echoed within the birth control movement. Women’s basketball seems a far cry away from sterilization campaigns. Yet, this same dynamic is evidenced in the debate between people who thought basketball was inappropriate for women and those who held that the game was actually optimally appropriate. Women’s basketball pedagogues also argued that the game could secure the reproductive vitality of white women both morally and physiologically. They implicitly posited the game’s social utility as a subtle eugenic technology well suited to modern white women who had newly accessed “possessive individualism,” or self-property, the defining characteristic of legible personhood in liberal capitalism.

Basketball was articulated by physical educators as a remedy for the disruptions of modern urban life and the weakening hegemony of the “overrepresentation of Man.” Implicitly, this harkened back to a more pastoral history, where children breathed clean air, families were large, space was abundant, and white women largely stayed in the home. This past imaginary was deeply ensconced in not only the agrarian slave economy but also the dispossession of
indigenous lands. While this past was no longer viable in the reign of the “New Woman,” the desire to have these qualities and values rearticulated in the present was transmogrified onto the upper-class white women’s bodies as loci of economic, national, and cultural health.

**Conclusion**

While the origin story of women’s basketball is over one hundred years old, it nevertheless provides useful insight into how women’s athletics became sites where the politics of self determination and community membership coalesce. The transposition of women’s physical ability onto social capability was palpable in the early twentieth century through the dual logic of racial embodiment and ethnic community. Basketball was used by physical educators as a technology to further mediate this transposition of athletic ability into broader forms of social value, while acknowledging the harbinger of women’s rights.

In US sports historiography, the passage of Title IX in 1972 is held up as the tipping point when women gained equal access and sports became a significant site for girls’ and women’s empowerment. Yet, the early history of women’s basketball pedagogy reveals that this dynamic between women’s empowerment and sports arose in parallel with the women’s suffrage movement. The very emergence of US women’s team sports was adjacent to the expansion of US citizenship rights to previously excluded groups. In this way, women’s basketball provides deep insight into the relationship between ability and value that undergird the politics of feminist empowerment.

Further, this historical example demonstrates the attention that reformers paid to the body and the bodily technologies they mechanized in the service of progress. These physical educator advocates did not blindly accept the essentialism of gender vis-à-vis the sexed body nor did they assume athletic ability as an unchangeable embodied trait. In acknowledging how properly
administered basketball could cultivate positive physical, emotional, and mental qualities, they sought out modes of training and ritual that were intended to produce gender and sex in the body, soul, and mind. Feminist leaning physical educators, at the interstices of reform concerned with women’s rights and social engineering, attempted to secure gender as a measure of racialized personhood. Their proposed game intended to produce an able-bodied reproductivity that was synonymous with progress.

The womanhood of these athletic subjects, both the educator coaches and student players, served a racial epistemology that extends to notions of humanity, vitality, and life itself. Physical educators understood health and fitness as synonymous with racial value and approached basketball as a technology that could secure and optimize athletic ability. While physical educators argued that basketball needed to be regulated and governed, in actual fact the game was taken up broadly and extended well beyond the scope of educator desires. Educators had to contend with these disruptions as they conducted their campaign through print publics. While we tend to think about the technologization of racialized gender through as associated with late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, this cultural phenomenon of women’s basketball pedagogy demonstrates that these investments also extend along the long arc of the twentieth century. In this way, the emergence basketball as a pedagogy of racialized gender orient our critical faculties to the central issue at the heart of all sports, the transposition of athletic ability to hierarchies of social value. Even as arguments for empowerment, claims about the value of women’s sports fundamentally hinge on both epistemologies and ontologies of racial difference. Being mindful of this relationship can inspire more transformational understandings about the stakes of women's sports as cultural, political and economic activities that can inspire social transformation.
Notes


13 Joan Paul, “Clara Gregory Baer: Catalyst for Women’s Basketball,” in *A Century of Women’s Basketball: From Frailty to the Final Four*, eds. Joan Hult and Marianne Treckell (Reston VA: American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 1991), 37-53. Not long after in 1893, Clara Gregory Baer a physical educator at Sophie Newcomb College in New Orleans introduced basketball to her students. She had written to Naismith requesting a copy of his rules. In 1895 she published this first version of women’s rules with the title *Basquette*. She popularized her version women’s basketball in the US South and is also credited with a role in the invention of netball, a game similar to basketball and played in much of the United Kingdom and former English colonies. Her rules differed considerably from other versions throughout the country, but she nonetheless was on par with Senda Berenson in her influence of the early pursuits. Yet, Berenson’s rules slowly ascended to have greater imprint on the game we recognize today.

14 Spears, “Senda,” 25. The first intercollegiate competition between Smith College and University of California, Berkeley on April 4, 1892.


20 Robert Peterson, *Cages to Jump Shots: Pro Basketball’s Early Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 48. Peterson notes that even men’s rules were not uniform and varied with at least five major popular styles.


24 Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 167.


32 This post-Reconstruction Era moral panic around white slavery and prostitution attempted to regulate racialized mobility and women’s sexual agency. The entrance of many women into the industrial wage economy and the suffrage movement influenced the emergence of the “New Woman.” Sexual agency became more palpable as an act of gendered autonomy and self-determination. Anxieties over white slavery and sexual selection promulgated fears of miscegenation and emphasized the degenerative capacity of women.

34 Jaime Schultz, Qualifying Times: Points of Change in U.S. Women’s Sport (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 73


36 Rita Liberti, "'We Were Ladies, We Just Played Basketball Like Boys': African American Womanhood and Competitive Basketball at Bennett College, 1928-1942,” Journal of Sport History 27, no. 3 (1999): 567-584. While some African American colleges initially maintained varsity sports, the tension between middle-class respectability and physical competition also resulted in the move toward intramural play days.


38 Berenson, Basket Ball for Women 1901, 4. The first Executive Committee on Basket Ball Rules included 4 members. Alice Bertha Foster, Director of Physical Training for Women at Oberlin College served as Chairman. The other three included Ethel Perrin, Instructor of Gymnastics at Boston Normal School of Gymnastics, Elizabeth Wright, Director of Physical Training at Radcliffe College, and Senda Berenson, who was then the Director of Physical Training at Smith College. By 1916, the Executive Committee on Basket Ball Rules had shifted to include different personnel. With Senda Berenson as chairman, the new members included Jessie Bancroft and Josephine Beiderhase both Assistant Directors of Physical Training for New York public schools, Elizabeth Burchenal, inspector of Girl’s Athletics in New Work Public Schools, Dr. C Ward Crampton, Director of Physical Education in New York Public Schools, Harry Fisher, Graduate Manager of Columbia University Athletics, . George T. Hepbron, Associate Editor of the Spaldings’ Men’s Official Basketball Guide, and Dr. Luther H. Gulick, then President of the Camp Fire Girls. Returning members from the initial committee included Ethel Perrin, then Director of Physical Training for Detroit Public Schools, and Elizabeth A. Wright, Director of Physical Training at Radcliffe College. 


42 Berenson, “Significance,” 22

Clifford Putney, "Luther Gulick: His Contributions to Springfield College, the YMCA, and Muscular Christianity," Historical Journal of Massachusetts 39, no. 1-2 (2011): 144. Born to Christian missionaries in Hawaii, he studied physical education at Oberlin but leave due to chronic illness. Later a graduate of the Sargent Normal School for Physical Training, and City University of New York medical school, Gulick would become a key figure in the fields of physical education, childhood development, and public hygiene. He wrote books with such titles as The Efficient Life, Mind and Work, Manual of Physical Measurements, Medical Inspection of Schools, and The Philosophy of Play. He was a proponent of the Progressive Era play movement which sought to cultivate recreational publics for children and young adults and with his wife, he founded the Camp Fire Girls, a sister organization to the Boy Scouts. In 1903 he became president of the American Physical Education Association and in 1907 he served as president of the Playground Association of America, which later became the National Recreation Association.


Gulick, “Psychological,” 12.

Gulick, “Psychological,” 12.

Gulick, “Psychological,” 12.

Gulick, “Psychological,” 12.


These include “Making Basket Ball Safe for Women” and “Basket Ball for Girls in Recreation Centers” written by Florence D. Alden, supervisor of Girl’s Athletics in Baltimore Public Schools, The Interpretation of Basket Ball Rules” by Leslie Sawtelle of the Boston School of Physical Education, “Basketball for Girls Who Work” by Irene Shaw of the Boston Store Educational Department in Milwaukee, “Basketball as a Teaching Asset” by Ruth Milne the Director of Physical Education, Oshkosh State Normal School, “The Score Book and the Score Board” by Dr. Emmett D. Angell, author of Wilson’s men’s basketball guidebook and former University of Wisconsin coach, and “Basket Ball for the Girl Who Expects to Coach” by Katie R. Williams, Director of Games at Chicago Normal School of Physical Education.

Berenson’s professional ties to the northeast and New York City served to influence the authors chosen to contribute to her guide. As an editor with affiliations to Ohio State University Bocker drew more authors from Midwestern and Atlantic cities into her project, from Baltimore, Milwaukee, Madison, and Chicago in addition to Boston. Two of these authors, Katie R. Williams and Ruth Milne, held positions as directors at Normal Schools. Florence Alden and Emmett Angell held education posts, at public schools and colleges respectively, and one author, Irene Shaw, headed the education department at a large department store called, Boston Store that would become a major department store throughout the Midwest.


Her other publications include a 1915 essay in Playground and Recreation Association of America’s Journal titled “Social Cleavage and the Playground” wherein she argued the playground deals with race cleavage by Americanizing immigrants” (9:1, 87), Birth Control Methods in 1924, a report on contraceptives used at the Clinical Research Bureau, and Mother’s Manual: The Coming and Care of the Baby in 1925 which addresses disease prevention and hygiene for newborns.

Dorothy Bocker, “Basket Ball and Health,” 5.


Bocker, “Basket Ball and Health,” 8.


Thomas Wood, “Team Sports for Girls and Women,” in *Basket Ball and Indoor Baseball for Women*, eds. Helen Frost and Charles Digby Wardlaw (New York: Scribner and Son’s, 1920), xiv-xv. In another 1920 guide, a similar sentiment is echoed. In it Thomas Wood writes, "hysteria does not often occur in those with well-trained muscles; nor in girls with feeling and action well balanced" (xv). When played correctly, basketball offered optimized coordination between mind, body, and emotion. Wood further noted, “The athletic field provides the site “where the fundamental primitive impulses find elemental and satisfying expression; and where the wise interpretation of game rules establishes sure foundations for moral concepts and conduct…in the lives and education of most girls, sense training still plays relatively too large a part. Feeling too often overbalances everything else. The appeals to the emotions are ofttimes torrential and overwhelming. Feeling and doing are frequently too widely separated. Thought and action are seldom sufficiently and closely associated. Judgment is confused, will is flabby, and executive power deficient, not because of the absence of worthy motives, but through the lack of effective habits of action.” Too much emotion and other poorly trained affectively “primitive impulses” caused a gulf between the internal mind and external action, and delimited one’s capacity for moral willfulness as well as overall physical health. However, basketball offered the possibility to subdue primitive impulses through habitual action.


Bocker, “Basket Ball and Health,” 8.

Bocker, “Basket Ball and Health,” 11.


76 Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality," 326.


80 For more on the materiality of gender, see Judith Butler, Bodies That Matter (New York: Routledge, 1993).


Chapter 3: Athletic Labor in Industrial and Barnstormer Basketball

Introduction

In a 1929 Harper’s Weekly article titled “Women and the Sport Business,” sports writer John Tunis outlines a major debate among people interested in women’s sports and their social utility. Leaning on the side of physical educators, he writes, “certain forces are attempting for their own ends, to entangle girls of this country in highly organized competitive sport.” These forces included chambers of commerce and trade boards, sporting goods and department stores, churches, entrepreneurs, athletic organizations like the AAU and industrial sponsors. Tunis offers this description of a popular scene:

Let me take you to a typical contest between the women's basketball teams of two large industrial concerns. The men's teams of the Johnson Manufacturing Company is playing the William Smith's Sons Corporation and, as an added attraction, the athletics directors have arranged that the girls of each company shall meet in a preliminary contest. The small hall is crowded with five or six hundred young men and girls sitting on the floor right up to the lines of the court; the smoke is so thick you can hardly see the closed windows at each end of the room, and the sultry atmosphere of a rainy spring evening outside is deepened and intensified within. Add to this the keenness of the struggle, the hundreds of watching - and sometimes leering - eyes, the incessant cheers and jibes from the spectators, the emotion produced by constantly being tumbled against the front row of onlookers, and the result is that the players are in a brittle state of excitement. The nerves of the strongest are on edge; one of the players weaker than the rest, collapses completely before the crowd. In the dressing room, she becomes racked by hysterics, her body tightly drawn into a knot; for the moment she is a nervous invalid.
In this passage, Tunis paints a picture of what industrial women’s competition looked like. He describes a gymnasium teeming with a crowd full of emotion, directing energy unto the teams. There is rivalry, fervent competition, and the public spectacle of sex on display. Entertainment is produced in the constant tumble, brittle excitement, nerves, hysteric and elation that occur in such a sultry, overcrowded environment full of leering and attentive eyes. While he surely exaggerates, Tunis also draws attention to the range of work being done by these women basketball players. They are employees of the respective Johnson and William Smith’s Sons companies, but here, their work is basketball. Theirs is a physical labor for goods-producing manufacturers and yet, in this scene, they provide a service—an affective and entertaining experience for audience members which depends in part upon the marketization of their athletic ability.

Early women’s basketball is a dynamic site from which to consider the relationship between sporting cultures, athletic labor, and capitalist sensibilities as they relate to the logic of ability. In this chapter, I explore how basketball became a form of labor for some industrial-era women workers. First, I begin by reviewing the emergence of industrial athletics and their relation to dominant paradigms of economic efficiency. Next, I trace the development of increasingly competitive women’s basketball in the midst of a maturing industrial US economy. I focus on the two primary avenues of paid athletic labor which were on offer to women—namely, the opportunities that arose in industrial company-sponsored teams and the opportunities that emerged as part of entrepreneurial barnstorming exhibition teams.

Industrial era professional and semi-professional women’s basketball remains a minor highlight in the historical record on women’s sports. Most published research on professional teams and leagues in the first half of the twentieth century has focused on the men’s game.³ With
the exception of a few book-length studies on women's teams or all-stars, tournaments, and leagues, mention of this cultural phenomenon remains scant and tends to focus on the years after World War II. Among these historically focused texts, theoretical investigation of the concept of labor is almost absent, even as basketball is acknowledged as paid work. And in broader research on industrial era commercial leisure and early twentieth-century US women’s labor history, women’s athletics gets little attention. However, the history of barnstorming and industrial sponsored teams is a useful site from which to explore political economy, popular culture, and the role of gendered labor. In explaining the history of professionalism in women’s basketball, I sketch major distinctions between work versus recreation, amateur versus professional, as well as material versus immaterial production. These binary concepts were crucial in segmenting women’s basketball as a social activity, but my exploration also shows how these distinctions were far from stable.

Thus, this chapter makes two important interventions. First, through an assessment of discourses amateurism and professionalism, I consider how women’s athletic ability became a form of what Pierre Bourdieu called cultural capital. He notes:

Most of the properties of cultural capital can be deduced from the fact that, in its fundamental state, it is linked to the body and presupposes embodiment. The accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of what is called culture, cultivation, Bildung, presupposes a process of embodiment, incorporation, which, insofar as it implies a labor of inculcation and assimilation, costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor. Like the acquisition of a muscular physique or a suntan, it cannot be done at second hand.
Athletic ability is a form of embodied cultural capital that accrues over time, but athletic ability is also a form of labor power. This is to say that capital accumulates through and within the same body that is dispossessed of its labor power to create surplus value. This presents an interesting conundrum for how to understand alienation in capitalism. Exploring this further, I consider the concepts of “productive labor” and “living labor” to account for athletic ability as a kind of gendered work done by women basketball players. Then, I demonstrate how this accounting of athletic ability helps elucidate the ideology of capacity that undergirds both capitalist and anti-capitalist orientations to labor. By focusing on athletic ability, we can see the way that productive labor and living labor, while they are positioned in opposition, both rely on a calculus of productive capacity and life force that presumes able-bodiedness.

In this way, athletic ability was embedded in an equation of value that gathered hierarchies of race, gender, and class, but also those of age, aesthetics, and affect. These women athletes did more than just play a game, their labor extended beyond the court. It entailed a variety of activities intermingled with actual basketball play. They hosted visitors, greeted fans, provided supplemental entertainment, participated in beauty pageants, devised fundraisers, walked in parades, and attended banquets. They were representatives of companies and communities. This range of diverse activities comprised their work and their athletic ability ranged beyond just physical talent and gamesmanship. Players were selected for teams on the basis of their athletic prowess, but beauty and charisma played a role as well. These athletes used their bodies in a profoundly physical type of work. This work looked different than many other industrial jobs. They were entertainers and dealt in affect for mass audiences, facilitating pleasure and enjoyment. As cultural representatives and entertainers, they also carried the symbolic weight of race and gender relations in society at large.
Secondly, this analysis contests a dominant narrative of economic transformation that characterizes the chronological shift in labor history from Fordism, and its cousin Taylorism, to post-Fordism, otherwise understood as the industrial to post-industrial eras. I use women’s basketball as one site to investigate whether dominant characterizations between these periods hold true. I argue that industrial era women’s basketball troubles a simple interpretation of industrial era work as categorically different from post-industrial labor relations and working conditions and instead I rely on Raymond Williams’s concept of “structures of feeling” to argue that emergent tendencies toward what we characterize as postmodern, post-industrial or post-Fordist can actually be observed within industrial era women’s basketball. By documenting this early history of professionalism in women’s basketball, I argue that athletic ability in the early twentieth-century US industrial economy contains emergent features of postindustrial work life within it.

Historical inquiry into the role of affective labor in sports at the emergence of mass leisure offers new insight into the perceived shifts and transformation in political economy. While modes of immaterial production and affective labor dominate the postindustrial US economy, I contend these qualities also existed in the Fordist era and can be observed in the history of industrial women’s basketball. This is not to say the dominant characterizations of Fordist economy as standardized goods production and unskilled factory work are wrong, but it is rather to draw attention to the facets of postindustrial economy that were pre-emergent and yet co-present with industrial life. Accounts of postindustrial transformation highlight increasingly deeper dispossession and marketization of what Marx called “living labor.” Yet, the example of industrial era women’s basketball renders this process more contiguous than some periodizations would have us believe. Also, given the increase in pink collar employment for the majority of
working people in the US, industrial era women’s basketball actually offers insight into the kinds of ability that are called on in gendered labor. Barnstormer and industrial company women basketball players occupied labor positions that actually seem quite similar to the kinds of service-based affective or emotional work that characterizes post-industrial life in much of the West. Lastly, given the increasing coordination of sedentary worklife as well as aesthetic technologization of exercise culture, this exploration of women’s basketball in the industrial setting contributes an important historical context to the changing culture of ableism that undergirds work and play in the United States. 9 This history of convergence of capital and labor around worker health and fitness has a longer arc that intersects with the history of women’s basketball.

**Work and Leisure, Professionals and Amateurs**

One of the primary distinctions drawn in human activity is the difference between work and play. Sports studies scholar Ben Carrington writes that traditional, orthodox Marxist analyses of culture offer “little in the way of an analysis of cultural reproduction. The leisure field is simply assumed to be a space for the re-creation of labour power.” 10 Within the field of sports studies, and in the subset of Marxist inspired cultural studies of sport, scholars have drawn attention to the political economy of sports and the material effects of labor upon the athlete’s body. In particular, the topic of professional or amateur categorization, surplus value, and labor exploitation have been raised. Sports have long been the purview of the domain of human activity we call play. Yet, sports are also sometimes work, deserving of pay in exchange for labor. 11 A recent call for papers in a special issue of the *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* titled, “Consuming Athletic Labor” opened: “The history of modern sport has been defined by a wide range of labor struggles, from individual contract disputes to collective acts of workplace dissent,
protest, and unionism.” Critiques of college and Olympic sports and the condemnation of surplus value and profit produced for universities, sportswear brands, telecommunication giants, and even cities and nations have been some of the most prominent Marxist sports studies examples. Much of this critical work on the way that capitalism absorbs and produces sporting cultures and athletic bodies has focused on men’s sports in the contemporary rise of sporting mega-spectacles and the post-industrial, neoliberal, globalized circuitry that undergirds it.13 Many feminist accounts of women’s athletic labor demonstrate that women athletes are often treated worse than their male counterparts in terms of compensation and status. This scholarly work to account for athletes as workers elucidates how sports become important sites of economic exchange that depend on designations of amateur or professional, as well as male or female. These accounts also build momentum for other analyses of capitalist accumulation and expansion on the backs of workers, like the ones who build mega-stadiums where athletes play. This Marxist inspired scholarship develops an important conversation on the intersection between sports and labor.

As discussed in chapter one, under the leadership and recommendations of physical educators, many high schools and colleges began to regulate against varsity women’s sports like basketball in favor of widespread participation, play days, and intramural events. In keeping with the goal of reproductive femininity, basketball was reigned in to become less competitive and more participatory. The goal was not to put on a show or to win. Instead, the stated aim was mass participation. At the same time that physical educators were promoting best practices for teaching women basketball, women’s teams were sprouting up all over the country with affiliations to community and corporate interests. These kinds of teams were devoutly committed to competitive play and corresponding mass spectatorship. The migration of basketball from
women’s colleges to industrial settings demonstrates a shift from athletics as primarily an upper-class women’s pursuit into one that working women pursued as well.

Two distinct, and yet entwined, forces of nation-state governance and capitalist accumulation influenced the popularization of women’s basketball. In some ways, designations of amateur versus professional status reveal the tension between these two interrelated forces. Industrial basketball and its close cousin—barnstorming basketball—differed greatly from the physical education setting. In one scenario the game was thoroughly linked to commercialization and leisure. In the other, basketball was associated with education and amateurism.

Physical educators were invested in the mass and democratic participation of college and high school girls in basketball, where the moral lessons of teamwork and healthful recreation could be learned. In educational settings, basketball took on value as a pedagogical technology intended to secure a racial and national composition by disciplining women’s athletic ability within a liberal paradigm of reproductive citizenship. In this way, it was pitched toward only those who participated.

Industrial women’s basketball began as a recreational supplement for workers, producing a mental and physical docility on the part of the worker. In early industrial recreation, women’s basketball was participatory and served to generate loyal and healthy workers in spite of growing tension between the labor union movement and corporate powers. Over the years, however, this purpose changed too. John Schleppi writes, “Companies adopted various measures affecting the workers’ welfare as a means of increasing productivity. Improvements were made in safety and sanitary conditions, and managers acquired improved machinery and instituted more efficient production techniques. Among social programs, sport and recreation emerged as an important part of the companies’ efforts.”

As more women entered the workforce, industrial recreation
opportunities also increased. As industrial recreation became more institutionalized, team sports grew increasingly popular. Men’s team sports came to dominate the scene. At the same time, women’s team sports benefitted from the popularity of men’s teams.

Around the same time that women workers were joining sponsored industrial teams, they were also joining barnstorming basketball teams, or early travelling exhibition teams. These travelling teams were not rare; in fact, they were part and parcel of growing leisure economy that emphasized embodied performance. Barnstorming basketball followed a similar circuitry to travelling vaudeville culture. True to their name, some teams literally “stormed barns” when true gymnasiums or other suitable spaces were unavailable. Long before national professional leagues rose to prominence, entrepreneurial barnstorming, or travelling exhibition, teams connected disparate regions offering entertainment in an up-start, almost ad hoc, fashion as the market of talented players grew. Over time, industrial athletes began to more closely resemble barnstormers; they were entertainers and competitors.

By the 1920s, sports had begun to enter their “Golden Age” in US culture as mass leisure and consumer publics exploded. In later industrial and barnstorming settings, women’s basketball took on a very different purpose; basketball became a type of affective labor that provided entertainment for working-class publics. Women’s teams often played for audiences largely composed of working men with disposable income. These teams were usually coached or sponsored by men and they played with regional varieties of rules and regularly with men’s rules. Their game became more specialized, fewer people played, and athletic ability became a form of cultural capital, inclusive of skill, personality, style, and sex appeal.

Debates over women athletes’ status as amateurs or professionals hints at how the difference between work and recreation was maintained and for what reasons.
and newspaper accounts provide colorful and exaggerated descriptions of teams and games they played. In addition to reporting and coverage, popular news outlets presented debates over whether women should play professionally or remain amateurs as well as whether they should play publicly at all.

A 1934 Chicago Tribune article on the growth of women’s sports titled “Remembering When Knitting Was Girl’s Big Sport,” reflects on how much had changed for girl athletes in the first thirty years of the new century. The author recalls the days when “sports weren’t sports”, “the term ‘sport’ in those early days usually referred to the dapper rake whose beflowered vest was seen most frequently in the corner saloon. Women by no means engaged in athletics. They took “exercises” – usually in their boudoirs.” While the association of women and sport had shifted drastically, the association of spectator sports and sex remained. Similarly, a 1939 New York Times editorial titled “Exploiting Girls in Sports Decried,” reveals the tensions between advocates of amateurism, like the NAAF, and commercial interests. Two subheadings read “Commercial Groups Scored by Women for ‘Putting Sex’ Into Games” and “Amateur Federation Warned Against Amazon Type Whose Aim Is to Stage a Show.” The article opens: “the exploitation of young women athletes by commercial interests that lure the amateurs into spectacular games, presenting them as Amazon types whose feminine charms are played above sportsmanship, was condemned yesterday by at a meeting of the Women’s Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation.” At the meeting, leaders railed against commercial interests for “luring amateur athletes into their ranks, particularly young girls who travel over the country without proper chaperonage and go in for cocktail and pajama parties.” Physical educators condemned commercial influence on women’s basketball arguing that it turned a respectable pursuit into licentious and vice ridden activity, where traveling women athletes
would be lured into off-court antics that sound a lot closer to sex work than sports. Women’s competition inspired criticisms of masculine entrepreneurship or oversexualized, wayward femininity. These traits were not just observable in the actions of players but in and on their bodies. Thus, women athletes competing in front of public audiences, similar to their college counterparts, had to navigate the charge of being too masculine and undesirable as well as being too sexually available. The figure of the mannish woman, unfeminine in her pursuit of winning, and the oversexualized ‘sporting woman’ athlete converge in criticisms of professionalism and competitiveness in industrial and barnstorming basketball.

Nevertheless, industrial basketball became increasingly popular among some of the most recognizable US industrial behemoths as well as small and medium sized corporations. Industrial athletics steadily increased in popularity from the 1920s up through the Cold War and were boosted by wartime economy. Though no one has yet catalogued all of these teams, there were likely thousands between 1920 and 1950. To name just a few of the more recognizable companies, General Electric, Monsanto, Firestone, Hanes, MetLife, Goodyear Tire and Rubber, Western Electric, Vultee Aircraft, Lockheed Corporation, Sunoco Petroleum all fielded teams.20

Industrial teams differed from barnstorming teams in that women were designated as company employees and amateur athletes instead of paid professionals. Industrially sponsored teams participated in tournaments hosted by local, regional and national athletic organizations, like the AAU which formed to oversee amateur competition. Players were recruited based on skill because exciting games and winning teams generated more publicity for companies. Industrial leagues formed with a preponderance of men’s teams and women benefitted from these developments which offered opening slots to more high-profile headlining men’s games. Partnerships between community organizations like the YMCA and industrial entities also
provided women with facilities and other opportunities for league and tournament play. These opportunities for women’s teams were not uniform and arose within the specificities of local context.

Always the visitors, more entrepreneurial women’s barnstorming teams like All-American Red Heads, Ozark Hillbillies, African American Chicago Roamer Girls, the Chinese American Mei Wahs, and the integrated Texas Cowgirls traversed the country and even travelled internationally on occasion. They played their games against a variety of opponents, sometimes local women’s or even men’s community teams or their industrial counterparts. Their games were often interwoven with comedic and other variety routines. These live performances were social spectacles and popular forms of visual entertainment before the development of media like film and television. Athletes are not often included in the history of vaudeville performers, but sports like boxing, wrestling, baseball and basketball games took place adjacent to performances by singers, musicians, actors, acrobats, comedians, mimes, and minstrels.

Upon further inspection of this history of barnstorming and industrial play, it becomes clear that women’s basketball was not just a slight feature in the landscape of industrial recreation and commercial leisure. Among women’s sports, basketball vied with softball and bowling for most popular and most watched. In Chicago, a recreation survey noted, “basketball rates high as a sport in its popularity with spectators; in 1935 the total paid attendance was more than 80,000,000.” Some headliner games garnered as many as 5,000 or more spectators in attendance and some leagues had hundreds of teams. In the 1940s, the Hanes Hosiery team was wildly popular, and their games consistently sold out. Hanes employees attended their games for a 25-cent entry fee and other audience members paid 75 cents to fill a 2,000 seat gymnasium in Winston-Salem. While historically understated, women’s basketball was a popular and
widespread enough phenomenon that it can be observed across industry sectors as well as geographic regions.

While barnstorming and industrial basketball opportunities were dominated by men, women’s teams emerged among the milieu. Industrial era women’s sports did not enjoy the success of men’s sports, but they did tour and play adjacently to some of the most popular men’s basketball teams. Barnstorming teams did this as well. Where today men’s and women’s team sports are far more separated from one another, at this time they were far more likely to share playbills and travel schedules. Women athletes approximated varying degrees of professional status. They participated in organized company teams, they joined corporately sponsored teams, and they played on more independently organized touring barnstorming teams. In the first two instances, women were technically considered amateurs; basketball was not supposed to be their source of formal income. They maintained amateur status to be eligible for the large regional and national tournaments sponsored by the AAU. As barnstormers they were often considered touring professionals whose success and their salaries depending on ticket sales.

Despite the debates over amateur or professional status, distinctions were partial at best. As Giulia Palladini notes, “amateur labor is subject to a market rationale that operates beyond the means of production of the performer, but the formation of value is always already embedded in a peculiar conjunction of spatiotemporal relations that come into play specifically in the audience’s consumption.”\(^{24}\) The differences between professional and amateur play was not rigid. Statuses shifted under scrutiny, but the fact of audience consumption remained consistent. For example, the Chicago Recreation Commission reported that the city saw a variety of teams and the distinction between them was sometimes hard to maintain. The Commission wrote, “whether these teams are amateur, semi-professional or professional is difficult to determine.
inasmuch as they have, during their existence, competed against teams in all three classifications. Women employees who played on teams travelled as much or more than they actually worked on site. A few women began their playing careers on company teams and were lucky enough to find paid spots on professional barnstorming teams. Industrial companies played an integral role in developing early opportunities for women’s basketball in that they provided the early regional and national infrastructure as well as financial backing. Sometimes industrially sponsored teams went on barnstorming tours or played against barnstorming teams and some players went on to join barnstorming teams, as in the example of Babe Didrickson who first played for the Employer’s Casualty Insurance Company Golden Cyclones and later formed her own outfit, the Babe Didrickson’s All-Americans barnstorming team after she was barred from amateur competition. In all three industrial era iterations, basketball was imbricated in working life for those who played it even as it became part of the panopoly of US mass leisure that other workers began to enjoy.

Amateur and professional were designations used to differentiate and classify different kinds of labor and different kinds of workers as well as different kinds of women. In the world of sports, paid work makes someone a professional athlete. Unpaid work makes someone an amateur. Amateur pursuits are often thought of as undertaken out of love and fun, not profit. Amateur athletics are thus largely seen as a form of physical recreation. Recreation and its partner, leisure, are usually understood as things people do in their free time when not at work. While work degrades the vital capacity of the laborer, recreation is a process through which labor power and living labor can be partially regenerated. Recreation helps reproduce the reserve labor power capacity through pleasure, fun, and relaxation that contributes to greater health. Recreation partially sutures the wound of alienation, acting as a temporary and disciplinary salve
to the dispossession of one’s labor power while extending its purview. Physical recreation can socially reinvigorate and even bolster bodily, mental, and moral reserves, but it can also function to discipline labor in capitalism, which was the reason for the original emergence of company athletics. Paid recreation work, like in professional sports, also extracts mental and bodily reserve in pursuit of profit.

Organizations like the AAU and the NAAF attempted to differentiate amateur and professional sport, and, in doing so, policed the boundaries that constituted appropriate kinds of paid women’s work within industrial society. In reality, however, this difference between amateur and professional was not upheld. There was slippage between which teams and which players were considered industrial amateurs and which were considered professional barnstormers. Sometimes the same person or team could be classified in different ways even though their activity was the same. And certainly, the kinds of entertainment provided looked quite similar: working women on public display in contests of physical competition either against other women or men. Following Marxist feminist observations about the way the category of gender is produced through labor, these designations of paid and unpaid status also produce different kinds of gendered subjects along the vector of athletic ability.

**The Rise of Industrial Women’s Athletics**

At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, US companies started to incorporate athletics and exercise as a part of industry. In this era of industrial management, companies enacted a paternal embrace of workers alongside the mantra of industrial efficiency. Companies sought to build loyalty, enhance productivity, and dispel labor union organizing through a variety of tactics. Athletics were a popular component of industrial workplace culture throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Companies sponsored athletic fields and facilities as well as
teams for intramural and traveling competition. Team sports were probably most popular during the World War II burst of production, but they originated years earlier with the emergence of welfare capitalism and scientific management.\textsuperscript{27} Company loyalty and efficient labor characterize the mantras of welfare capitalism and scientific management. In this sense, industrial athletics were affective and somatic investments in surplus profit.

Alongside these employer efforts to stave off labor union drives, labor unions themselves also took interest in sponsoring recreation and sports teams.\textsuperscript{28} Gerald Gems notes, “in certain instances, labor unions also competed with corporate sponsors for workers filiality for example. the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, with more than 16,000 members, sponsored women’s basketball teams among other athletic ventures.”\textsuperscript{29} Interestingly enough, labor unions also adopted athletics as a way to increase their visibility, draw more members, and improve member and community identification with the union. Elizabeth Fones-Wolf notes that "in larger cities like Chicago, Camden, Detroit, Philadelphia, and Cleveland, locals sponsored so many athletic teams that the unions were able to develop interunion sports leagues."\textsuperscript{30} Union sponsored sports leagues became a way to generate solidarity across different unions as well.

As a form of athletic exercise, basketball was seen as valuable for its physiological utility, and as a team sport, it was useful for generating emotional bonds and camaraderie. These were important reserves required for the maintenance of working capacity, or labor power, for individuals as well as a larger social structure based on the division of labor. Costa and Guthrie note, “Exactly when industry began sponsoring women’s basketball teams is not known; it was perhaps as early as the mid- to late 1910s…Many employers saw the public relations benefits of fielding teams in this all-American sport and quickly began to recruit women with basketball skills.”\textsuperscript{31} Insurance agencies, banks, department stores, textile mills, automobile factories, utility
plants and entertainment venues, newspapers, and commercial manufactures all sponsored women’s basketball teams.

A 1910 Harper’s Weekly essay by George Jean Nathan titled “Athletics as an Aid to Trade,” demonstrates this sentiment that exercise and athletic participation increased profit and stability in industrial relations. His essay reiterates how concepts from welfare work and scientific management influenced the rise of industrial athletics. Calling the emerging trend “an alliance between athletics and commerce,” Nathan demonstrates how industrial athletics were no small investment:

One of the best examples of how athletics has been made to increase the working value of a business establishment is that of a large life-insurance company. The office building has been equipped with a complete gymnasium and shower-baths, a competent athletic instructor has been retained, and a schedule of athletic work has been mapped out for employees, both male and female. The gymnasium occupies the eleventh floor, and here, during the luncheon hour, directly after business hours, and on specified evenings during the week, the employees are given physical training. The women are provided with a special instructress on Wednesdays. There are organized basketball teams during the winter months. In spring and summer, the gymnasium is moved up to the roof. 32

Nathan also demonstrates how industrial athletics were intended to improve worker efficiency and productivity.33 Specifically addressing women workers, Nathan states, “The women clerks are taught the proper way to reach for boxes from the shelves, the best way to handle the boxes, the most beneficial way to walk and sit, the proper way to breathe, the best manner in which to pile up heavy rolls of dry goods.”34 Here, industrial athletics were developed to teach workers how best to exert and conserve energy in the interest of greater extraction of surplus labor.
Scientific management—also known as Taylorism for its founder and most prominent proponent Fredrick Winslow Taylor—was an organizational management paradigm that sought to maximize productivity within manufacturing industries by emphasizing segmentation and standardization. Like their Progressive Era counterparts in social work and physical education, industrial managers saw themselves as social engineers. They attempted to engineer economic efficiency by increasing productivity in individual workers and workplaces. Taylor and others promoted scientific management of production through time and motion studies, fixed rates, wage incentives, waste elimination and standardization. These methods required precision, calculation and analysis in the service of optimization. Managerial and supervisory positions increased to oversee these processes. Scientific management and welfare management both sought to increase profit by optimizing worker output. Yet, scientific management focused on the immediate and practical measures that could be fine-tuned in the production process. Welfare management sought to delimit worker dissatisfaction and resistance in order to generate optimum productivity. Scientific management focused on the life and activity of the shop floor and emphasized the relationship between managers and workers. Welfare work focused on life outside the shop floor and emphasized the building of company loyalty through worker relations.

Welfare capitalism can be defined as “any service provided for the comfort or improvement of employees which was neither a necessity of the industry nor required by law.” Welfare capitalism, also known as welfare corporatism or welfare work, arose during the late 1880s and started to fade by 1930s as state and federal government took on more responsibility for social welfare. This paradigm arose partly as an intervention against the increasing strength of union and worker power blocs to advocate for labor reform. Welfare capitalism attempted to forestall the growing strength of labor unions and government regulation by proactively
affording small benefits to employees instead of unions’ proposed systemic overhaul. Historian Andrea Tone has drawn attention to the manifestation of “industrial paternalism” in welfare capitalism as “anchored in the reality of employer provision and the expectation of employee deference, guided by a familial metaphor accentuating reciprocity, mutuality, and obligation.”

Industrial athletics were just one small feature of corporate welfare. Other forms of welfare ranged from cafeteria meals, break rooms, cultural activities and clubs, company newsletters, profit sharing, and other fringe benefits.

Both of these paradigms influenced the emergence of women’s industrial basketball. Welfare work provided opportunities and facilities to practice and play basketball. Scientific management’s principles of time and motion study brought physiology and productivity together, making athleticism a desirable trait in a worker. The body’s movements, expenditure, and timeliness came under an economic gaze. Welfare work presented a soft approach to optimizing productive efficiency and capitalist hegemony in workers’ lives by generating filial relations with the company as well as relationships between workers facilitated by the company and not by antagonistic labor unions. Scientific management demonstrated a more mechanic, but no less related approach to these goals of optimization and hegemony – both central to the biopolitics of capital. These two approaches were not mutually exclusive; they were both incorporated into industrial management practice as a way to discipline workers and extract the most labor at the lowest overall cost. Industrial management took into account the attrition entailed in long hours and physical toil but attempted to improve industrial relations without ceding profit or control over labor.

While the structure of management oversight and employee participation varied, industrial athletics were largely articulated as a project that could generate more company loyalty
and increase productivity, as well as alleviate tensions arising amidst the classed division of labor. However, desired homogeneity was more difficult to achieve in practice as class, ethnic and race division persisted in company athletics. Opportunities to participate in company athletics were delimited by race and ethnicity. A balance needed to be struck between worker solidarity in the service of paternal employers while maintaining race and ethnicity-based distinctions that would continue to uphold class division and justify racialized class as a metric of exploitability.

For example, division existed between women who worked in the office versus the shop floor. In this sense, team participation varied across skilled and unskilled labor categories. 38 While companies did attempt to provide opportunities across employment categories, they often maintained segregation along ethnic and racial distinction which effectively upheld class divisions. 39 In an essay titled “Basketball for Girls Who Work,” Irene Shaw argues that basketball, “when placed in good hands, properly organized, carefully directed and supervised is a valuable adjunct to an industrial organization.” 40 Shaw relays that on Milwaukee’s Boston Store team they have girls from all classes and levels of educational attainment from elementary school to university graduates. She writes, “one of the essential values of basketball in industry is that it develops a spirit of democracy. It is often found that there is quite a class division in many industrial organizations, factories, stores and offices as some of the girls consider themselves on a higher social level than others. This undemocratic spirit falls before true sportsmanship and all are equal on the basketball field.” 41 Allegedly, class hierarchy of industry, another term for the unequal social division of wealth, can be effectively subdued by women’s sportsmanship and team play. The basketball court is articulated as a place of equality and collective identity.
Yet, class divisions were not so easily erased by industrial athletics. In a 1922 essay for the *American Physical Education Review*, Dorothy Schaper reiterates this ideal when she states that athletics “tend to do away with the social distinctions always felt between shop girl and office girls” but that it is hardly achieved in practice: “it is usually one of the biggest obstacles…to get shop girls and the office girls to associate.”

While basketball, as a team sport, was supposed to generate loyalty and collective identification under the paternal guidance of the corporation, class divisions prevailed. In a 1930 essay titled “Growing Need of Physical Recreation Among Employed Women,” Bernice Amanda Miller, Metropolitan Director of Health Education at the YWCA, wrote about the differences in recreation interest between “Business and Professional and Industrial” women. Business and professional women included those in office or sales positions. Industrial women included any who work in manufacturing or factory floors, but Miller also includes “household employees.” Miller notes that business and professional women take to industrial athletics more readily than industrial women. She writes, “The factory worker or the foreign-born household employee lacks initiative, must be ‘hand-led’, and likes to find her own group where she goes.” It was likely the case that business and professional women could afford to take up recreation after work whereas lower level factory or household workers had second shift duties taking care of their own families and households. Since class was a racialized category, these obstacles reiterated the larger tensions of racial and economic inequality. While developed for their ability to make workers identify with one another across class category and improve worker identification with employer, industrial athletics failed to suture these social hierarchies that extended along the lines of race and nation. In some cases, they further solidified existing hierarchies of ethnicity and race.
From Recreational Supplement to Commercial Competition

Industrial sports grew from internal pursuits to include competition across companies and even industries. As workers began to earn more money working shorter hours, the consumer base expanded, and a leisure economy started to emerge. Workers took up gambling, driving, dancing, the movies, drinking, radio shows, as well as athletics and exercise in their time away from work. The concept of recreation diverges from leisure in its explicit association with moral or social utility. Employers had an investment in keeping their workers under their thumb, so vice was expedient in promoting docility and distraction but too much vice detracted from worker productivity. Passive pleasure was counter-posed against wholesome activity. Sport—playing, not watching—fell on the side of wholesome activity. In this sense, industrial athletics were truly intended to be recreational in nature; recreation literally meant the re-creation of labor power and worker docility. This was the context for the emergence of women’s basketball teams in the industrial setting.

Over time, industrial women’s basketball transformed to look more like the professional teams we know today. Historian Nancy Theriot writes, “Industries, forced by progressive reformers to provide some healthful activity to employees, found that women’s teams not only fulfilled this health requirement but also provided good publicity for their companies. The most popular game for industrial teams was basketball.” The rise of commercial sports threatened some of the wholesomeness associated with industrial athletics as a form of welfare work. H. Wyman, director of Welfare Work at Carnegie Steel Company in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, warned in 1914:

recreation should in no way be allowed to interfere with production. Some of the larger industries have allowed their athletic teams certain privileges that they have denied to
other employees; this has led to a great deal of labor trouble and unrest among non-athletic employees [sic]. From this condition has grown the professional industrial athletic teams, fostered and supported by sport-loving superintendents and managers, for the sole purpose of placing before the public a winning team. Money has been no object with this “win-at-any-cost” type of employers.47

Wyman warns against the use of industrial sports as a money driven project focused on reputation and competition. Yet, this is precisely what happened in later years. According to Monys Ann Hagen, company welfare administrators decried professionalism as a menace to industrial recreation. “Among the flagrant abuses cited were hiring workers exclusively for their athletic ability, paying worker-athletes exorbitant salaries for ‘soft jobs’, paying company athletes for practice time, and awarding substantial prizes at the end of the playing season.”48 As welfare work became institutionalized, opportunities to participate in company athletics increased. But as time went on, company teams became more formalized external representatives and the purpose of industrial sports shifted. Industrial teams became more of a source of advertising to potential consumers in the spectacle-seeking working public. This transition also signaled a move that rendered athletic ability increasingly marketable as a remunerative talent.

Women’s teams piggybacked on the popularization of men’s industrial sports and travelled across the country playing other industrial teams as well as local clubs and colleges. They competed in a number of local, regional, and even national tournaments. They mostly played in leagues and exhibition games intended to provide public entertainment and leisure alongside headliner men’s games. Where internal teams played for exercise and enjoyment, these teams played to win and/or to entertain paying customers. In doing so, they brought recognition
and fanfare to their sponsors, furthered worker identification with employer, and marked out a place for industrial manufacturers as cultural purveyors.

On most company teams, women players were considered employees of their corporate sponsors, but they were amateur athletes. They were not technically paid to play basketball, but basketball did ensure continued employment opportunities and became the means to articulate oneself as a laborer with a special skill set. To be competitive and entertaining, often women played with less restrictive men’s rules as well as less restrictive clothing. They traded in nondescript bloomers for sateen uniforms with company titles or logos. As Cahn puts it, “sport formed part of a broader consumer culture in which modern advertising, movies, and other commercial entertainment ventures relied on sexual themes, erotic titillation, or promises of romantic success to stimulate interest and sell products.”49 Women basketball players did not just play a game, their gendered affective work extended beyond the court. For example, they sometimes participated in beauty pageants, free throw contests, pep rallies and post-game banquets and dances.50

They would get to work inventory or clerical jobs to prevent injury and allow for travel. In their profile of 1940s Hanes Hoisery teams, Elva Bishop and Katherine Fulton write:

The women worked regular shifts except when traveling for games and were paid straight time for the work days they missed. The company assigned them to different areas of the plant so that no one function too would be greatly affected during their absence. Coach Yow insisted that they were not to miss their regular shifts at any other times, even if the team had returned from a trip at three a.m. the previous morning.51

The opportunity to play basketball for a company team afforded working-class athletes an opportunity to continue to play in one of the few post-high school venues available to them.
Basketball offered young mostly unmarried women the benefit of a steady job, regular travel, and continued enjoyment in a sport that many of them loved. They received special recognition and perks but were still expected to fulfill many of the duties of other employees. They travelled in a time where many women could not do so on their own.

As a form of cultural capital, athletic ability provided certain opportunities for social and class mobility that, while limited, speak to the value system in which certain physical qualities are produced and take on meaning. In writing about men’s professional basketball leagues that included independent and industrially sponsored teams, Murry Nelson notes, “the players often had used basketball to move from a working-class to a middle-class status. Many players were first-generation Americans born of immigrant parents who had little understanding of the game or of sport in general, particularly as a source of income.” For some men, being good at basketball provided opportunities to attend college, travel, make extra money, meet new people, and become locally or regionally famous. These opportunities were uneven but still occurred during a time of economic instability. Nelson writes further, “for many of the players, basketball had been their ‘ticket’ to college and a middle-class life. The Depression intervened, and basketball became the factor that helped them find jobs with Firestone or Goodyear, who sponsored basketball teams.”

While women experienced less of these opportunities and on a smaller scale, basketball nonetheless created an outlet for the cultivation and accumulation of athletic ability for some women.

The opportunities to play women’s industrial basketball grew in part through the Amateur Athletic Union’s (AAU) sponsorship of regional and national tournaments. The AAU partnered with industry in the sense that it provided many of the opportunities and occasions for industrial women to compete. In doing so, it popularized women’s sports as a form of commercial leisure.
but made sure to regulate the difference between professional and amateur status. The first women’s AAU basketball championships were held in Pasadena in 1926 and over 5,000 spectators attended.54

Debates over women’s professional status became more and more pronounced as the AAU rose to regulatory prominence and became the organizational body for women’s competitive basketball. Its national tournament was called off in 1927 and 1928 after protest by the NAAF (National Amateur Athletic Federation) against its legitimacy. The AAU tournament returned in 1929 with Wichita, Kansas as host. 55 The championship game took place between two Dallas based insurance company sponsored teams, the Schepp’s Aces and the Employers Casualty Life Insurance Company Golden Cyclones. The tournament was then held consistently up through the 1970s and annual regional tournaments were also established. The AAU also added the component of beauty pageants in 1929 and later, team parades took place as part of the tournament. These supplemental beauty contests featured the selection of a queen and princesses. Each team would select one player to compete in the contest judged by an anonymous panel, which many knew to be men sportswriters.56

While the AAU supported women’s competition it sought to create hegemony as the regulatory body for women’s sports. As competitive women’s basketball grew more popular, the AAU began to require team and player registration. It took administrative action against teams and players found to be in violation of the code of amateurism. For example, Babe Didrikson was perhaps the most famous female athlete of her generation. She quit high school to become a clerical worker and basketball player at Employers Casualty Insurance Company (ECC) in 1930. The ECC Golden Cyclones were vastly popular. They played for thousands and their games were sometimes broadcast on radio. At 19 years old, Didrikson earned $75 dollars a month playing for
the company team.\textsuperscript{57} At the same time, she received offers to play for Kansas City Life Insurance Company. She claimed they offered girls $80 a month to start with a free company cafeteria as well as a $25 bonus per victory in season games, $50 bonus for tournament wins, and $100 bonuses for wins in city championships or national games.\textsuperscript{58} Yet, these bonuses were allegedly not a violation of AAU rules, as they had been approved by AAU officials and fell under the dimensions of employee status. Two years later in 1932, Babe Didrikson was sanctioned and suspended by the AAU because her photograph was used in a print advertisement for a Dodge car. She refused reinstatement, resigned from ECC and the AAU, and turned to professional touring with a vaudeville act, as well as basketball and baseball teams.\textsuperscript{59} Didrickson was not the only one targeted by the AAU’s amateurism policies. The Taylor Trunks, one of the eras most dominant women’s teams, were also subject to investigations. In the late 1920s, after winning AAU titles in 1923, 1924, and 1925, the AAU declared the team ineligible for AAU competition when members Marie Curtin and Elizabeth Falbisaner were designated professionals due to their positions as playground instructors in Chicago parks.\textsuperscript{60}

Barnstorming basketball became popular in the early twentieth century as a traveling form of entertainment indelibly linked to the vaudeville tradition. “Almost all of the early vaudeville entrepreneurs came from the lower end of the amusement business. Most had spent their adult lives traveling with a circus of variety troupes from town to town.”\textsuperscript{61} Vaudeville brought oddities on regional and national tours and laid the fibers of cultural experience that networked emergent mass leisure in the United States. Like the vaudeville acts that preceded them, barnstorming teams needed to keep audiences interested in their exhibitions. They did this through advertising talents and oddities as well as playing with a showy style full of trick plays and gimmicks.
Like its cousin, industrial women’s basketball, barnstorming basketball was a form of entertainment on offer to working-class communities throughout the country. Unlike industrial players, these basketball barnstormers were explicitly professional paid players and their teams were often not affiliated with established leagues. These teams were ineligible for amateur competition and they embodied all of the criticisms advocates of amateurism espoused. They were showy, scantily clad, used gimmicks, lived life on the road, and often made their reputations by against playing men’s teams. Sometimes these teams would play in leagues and go out on barnstorming tours during their off seasons. Some teams would play well over 100 games in a season.62

While barnstormers were often not associated with industrial partners they benefitted from the spectator markets developed through industrial teams and the player pool created by high school athletics. Barnstorming teams were most often formed by promoters and entrepreneurs who had experience with men’s professional and semi-professional basketball. The Washington Post ran a story on October 24, 1926 titled, “Pro Basketball for Girls in District is Rumored,” about a professional racketeer: “some of the best women cage players in the city have been approached and receiving rather flattering offers to turn pro. If present plans do not miscarry it is said that paid sextets will play preliminary games to the regular American league contests.”63 Early professional teams found momentum from the growing popularity of men's professional leagues. They would play other women’s teams or men’s teams as opening entertainment for crowds that arrived early for headliner men’s games. In addition, promoters would constitute teams from local high schools, industrial talent, or even women greats from other sports. Much like boxing, promoters would schedule and orchestrate playing tours, again often opening for men’s headliner games. Sometimes teams would partner with promoters who
would book team schedules in coordination with other men’s teams. Interestingly, more is known about promoters than many of the players themselves. In a few instances, women player-coaches bought or took over their own teams after gaining experience as players on successful barnstorming teams. Examples of women-owned teams include the Helen Stephens Olympic Co-Eds, the Ozark Hillbillies, and later the Hazel Walker’s Arkansas Travellers.64

Much like in industry, the worlds of men’s and women’s professional basketball were intertwined with men acting as promoters and coaches. For example, Dick Hudson, a former professional football player and nightclub promoter, was a major force behind African American barnstorming teams from Chicago. He originally managed the Giles Post men’s team from Chicago that was hired to promote the Savoy Ballroom, a nightclub on Chicago’s South Side. In 1928, the team changed its name to the Savoy Big Five, using the ballroom as its home court and traveling around the city and state to advertise through its games. The Savoy Big Five would later become the famed Harlem Globetrotters, but on at least one occasion the team included men and women playing together.65

Hudson also threw his effort behind women’s basketball and softball teams as well. He pulled together what would become one of the country’s best known African American women’s basketball teams, the Chicago Club Store Co-eds, a group he would fashion after the Harlem Globetrotters. The New Club Store Inc. was a business on Chicago’s South Side owned by C.H. Talley, a labor and civic leader who was later elected the Mayor of Bronzeville, a position of local esteem within Chicago’s African American community. The Co-eds featured star players Lula Porter, Tidye Pickett, and Helen Smith. Porter was a national tennis star and was among a few famous women tennis players that also had prolific basketball careers.66 Pickett was the first African American woman athlete to compete in the track and field at the Olympics.67 Smith was
a talented former Lemoyne college player and prolific 6’7” center whose height was well renowned. They played other local African American teams as well as white women’s teams around the city. They also toured to play men’s and women’s teams.

The Club Store Co-Eds benefitted from an already existing women’s basketball community throughout Chicago, and within Chicago’s Black Belt more specifically. The Club Store Co-Eds formed in 1934 and were billed as a kind of replacement to the earlier Roamer Girls. The Chicago Roamer Girls were an African American team affiliated with Grace Presbyterian Church on the South Side. They formed around in 1921 and played around the city with the famous Olympian long jumper and former professional football player Sol Butler as their coach. Sometime between 1926 and 1928 the Roamer Girls dis-banded and their players went on to play for a few other teams, namely the Savoy Colts (Chicago Savoy Ballroom women’s team), the Community Girls, or the Club Store Co-Eds.

Although they went by the name Club Store Co-Eds in Chicago, while traveling they used the name Roamer Girls. Under Dick Hudson’s management the Co-Eds toured through Midwestern states like Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota. In 1935, local news reported that the team was “already picked for the AAU title, the team is fast rounding into shape for its annual tour that will see it against some of the finest teams in the country.” They were somewhat unique in that they also toured through the west coast. The 1935 AAU championship was held in Denver and in 1937 they took a tour along the Pacific Coast that lasted several weeks. While traveling, they were billed as national or world champions, even though there was no tournament or league to confirm this claim. By 1939, they changed their name to the Bivin’s All Stars because they had acquired a new sponsor and promoter, Matthew Bivins Jr. Bivins operated Bivins Van Lines transportation company but was well known for his policy
racketeering operations. Policy was an illegal lottery played mostly in poorer areas. Bivins was remembered as “unlettered and crude, liked big times…a giver of lavish parties…nothing fascinated him more than persons like theatrical folk especially glamorous women.” Bivins’ sponsored team exemplified this theatrical and glamorous spirit in their play. By the 1940s the Bivins’ All Stars began to use the name Chocolate Co-Eds while on barnstorming and even made it out to Alberta, Canada on one trip.

Perhaps the most famous, or at least most prolific, women’s barnstorming team of the twentieth century was the All-American Red Heads who played consistently from 1936 to 1986, a record breaking fifty years as the longest running women’s professional basketball team. In 1936, they started barnstorming across the county and traveled up to six months a year. Over the years the team would travel to all fifty states as well as Mexico, Canada, and the Philippines. The team was established in Cassville, Missouri, by C.M. Olson and his wife, Doyle Olson. CM Olson was the owner, promoter, and coach of two men’s barnstorming teams called Olson’s Terrible Swedes and the Famous Giants. The team later moved their home base to Caraway, Arkansas, and were coached by Orwell Moore in the forties. In 1955, he and his wife Lorene “Butch” Moore bought the team.

The women’s team took the name Red Heads as a way to advertise Doyle Olson’s beauty salons. She had a number of beauty salons around Missouri and Arkansas. She hired female basketball players to work in her salons. Allegedly, two employee players had red hair. After some convincing, Doyle got the rest of the players to dye their hair and the team started playing under the name the Cassville Red Heads. After a little while they started recruiting AAU standouts from across the region and changed their name to the All-American Red Heads. The All-American Red Heads started playing local men’s teams and gained a reputation for being
both athletically talented and attractive. The Red Heads were advertised as “America’s Greatest Attraction Playing Men’s Teams Under Straight Men’s Rules” (see Figure 2). They mostly played men’s teams and used men’s rules and won a vast majority of the games they played.

**Figure 2: All-American Red Heads Promotional Poster**

![All-American Red Heads Poster; circa 1930s](Encyclopedia of Arizona)

By 1937, the Red Heads were so successful that they added a second traveling women’s team called the Ozark Hillbillies. In later years, up to three All-American Red Heads Squads toured at a time. During the early years, the All-American Red Heads averaged 160 games
annually and played up to 7 or 8 games a week. The women won more than 50 percent of their
match-ups against men's teams and over the years amassed a 70 percent winning percentage.\textsuperscript{79} Under Olson’s instruction they would start games playing aggressively to build a lead. After
doing so, they would then play with more accentuated style, incorporating tricks in their dribble
and shooting. They would act flirtatiously with the audience, opposing team, or referees. Before
the end of the game they would switch back to more aggressive play to ensure a win. This
guaranteed easygoing entertainment alongside the oftentimes uncomfortable fact that the women
were routinely outplaying and beating men playing by men’s rules.

As the manager and promoter of the Terrible Swedes and Famous Giants, Olson booked
the games, managed the team, and publicized the events. With his men’s team he often booked
the team with a minimum guarantee as well as a percentage of admission proceeds. He likely
took a similar approach with the All-American Red Heads. The team only received their
schedules a few weeks in advance and players had to keep them confidential for fear that another
team would set up to steal their crowds. Their tours were indeterminate in length since they often
played as long as it took to make sufficient profit. Players also agreed to behavioral codes that
included no smoking or drinking while on tour. For games they were required to wear blue
eyeshadow, red lipstick, and dye their hair red with henna paint. In later years under Moore’s
leadership, they were not allowed to date any men except the ones they played against and had to
go on dates with a chaperone.\textsuperscript{80} Whether these rules were strictly followed remains unlikely.

Barnstorming teams sold themselves not just as skilled athletes but as novelty acts. They
staged exhibition matches that regularly included gimmicks like half time shows, trick plays,
physical oddities, and matches with local men’s teams. Robert Ikard describes the All-American
Red Heads as a “combination of basketball skills (they were good players), pulchritude (sex
sells), and comedic shlock (as pioneered by the Harlem Globetrotters).” Teams used their racial identities and gendered performances to elicit audience interest. They played on the sensationalism of their non-normative place as female athletes.

Figure 3: Helen Smith, “Giant Center” and “Latest Basketball Sensation”


To do this, promoters drew attention to their physicality, both as an aberration of and an exceptional example of feminine beauty. As Pruter notes, the Co-eds and the Red Heads both
marketed themselves with reference to their distinctive physical appearance and attributes.\textsuperscript{82} For example, Hudson advertised Smith as an almost seven feet tall giant (see Figure 3). Canadian Newspapers reported Smith as “tallest woman in the world” and Pickett as “the fastest woman in the world.”\textsuperscript{83} Pickett raced audience members during halftime and Hazel Walker, a sharpshooter standout for the redheads, challenged audience members to shooting contests. The Ozark Hillbillies allegedly dressed as hillbillies. These and other teams chose uniforms to match their showy style of play. They wore revealing sateen outfits adorned with their team names. For example, in 1938, the \textit{Los Angeles Times} reported on the Red Heads’ upcoming game against the Warner Brothers Studio men’s team, highlighting Kay Kirkpatrick, the team’s best shooter who stands taller than 6 feet and “is known throughout the Midwest as the ‘personality girl.’”\textsuperscript{84}

Standout athlete Tidye Pickett earned $480 over 26 weeks in 1939 although she was listed as unemployed. Pruter speculates “the amount of income probably reflected some or much of her basketball earnings” playing with the Club Store Co-eds.\textsuperscript{85} This averaged to about $18 per week. Though barnstorming did not pay for an entire year’s work, averaged out over 52 weeks, $18 a week was more than a woman’s median income working in domestic service, beauty shops, laundry, restaurants, manufacturing, clerkships, or sales work, but slightly less than a librarian or school teacher would make.\textsuperscript{86} For an unmarried African American woman, barnstorming could provide cultural and financial opportunities. Hazel Johnson, a former player for the Chicago’s traveling white women’s team the Taylor Trunks from 1929 to 1935, remembers, “When I played, it was during the Depression,” she said in a 1994 interview. “We were paid $10 a game against the men, and that was good. When I went to work, I got $10 a week.”\textsuperscript{87}
They were entertainers who were required to bring their whole selves, including their racialized femininity, to their pursuits—not only their athletic talents on the court. In this sense, they were compensated not only for how they well played but who they were, including their personality, sociability and beauty, further blurring the boundaries between work and life in industrial era leisure economy. Basketball offered women players greater economic security and independence as well as the opportunity to see new places and meet new people throughout the country.

**Athletic Ability, Labor Power, and Historiographies of US Capitalism**

My presentation of historical women’s basketball in the industrial era contributes an important addition to this scholarship on the relationship between sport and political economy. My reading of athletic ability as encompassing both capital and labor is interesting for two main reasons. One is the way it complicates how we understand the central problems of alienation and estrangement that occur in the exploitation of working people. I read “living labor” into women’s basketball but also ask a critical question about what is desired in the concept of “living labor,” namely able-bodiedness. In addition, my analysis of historical women’s basketball cautions against too easily relying on the distinction between industrial and post-industrial moments. I argue designations between industrial and post-industrial capitalism are often overstated. The transformation that appeared in the signal of globalization from the 1970s onward is in fact not the transformational moment we thought it was. This shift should be understood as one of degree, not in type.

Athletic ability is an expression of gender in a biopolitical process that is technologized through basketball. Sylvia Federici, in her critical assessment of the gendered aspects of Foucauldian biopolitics, writes that the “promotion of life-forces turns out to be nothing more
than the result of a new concern with the accumulation and reproduction of labor-power...the goal of capitalist society is to transform life into the capacity to work and ‘dead labor.’” Here, capacity to work is crucial to the valuation of athletic ability as a biopolitical process that is technologized through basketball. Women’s athletic ability emerged as a gendered labor power and a means of accumulation of more cultural capital, and it helps us see that the way capital takes the form of “dead labor” does not necessarily look like alienated attrition of the factory worker who toils and toils unto injury, disease, or death. Further, Federici maintains, “gender should not be considered a purely cultural reality but should be treated as a specification of class relations.” Instead of a purely ideological social construct, here gender operates as an index of class division, or the division of bodies on the basis of their labor power and inclusive of their capacity to further reproduce labor power. As an index that orders hierarchy, gender congeals around the relationship between material body and productive capacity. Athletic ability is one expression of biopolitical accumulation that calls on mental, physical, and affective labor.

Athletic labor on the part of women basketball players disrupts the archetype of the industrial woman worker as either in the factory or in domestic service, demonstrating a kind of gendered labor that took place outside the home in the scene of working-class recreation. Through the technology of industrial basketball, women’s athletic ability expressed particular performances of gendered labor and accumulated capital.

To elucidate athletic ability in a Marxist orientation to labor more generally, I rely on the two previously mentioned Marxist concepts: “productive labor” and “living labor.” Marx designated productive labor as that which we understand as waged or salaried and exchanged in capitalist accumulation, wherein workers exchange their labor as a commodity. Marx writes, "Productive labor is therefore—in the system of capitalist production—labor which produces
surplus-value for its employer, or which transforms the objective conditions of labor into capital and their owner into a capitalist; that is to say, labor which produces its own product as capital.° Productive labor arises within capitalist relations of production and alienation occurs as its by product.° The tenor exhibited by Marx in The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 suggests a dehumanizing loss in which the external sensuous world becomes more and more estranged and the worker becomes less and less human. Here, alienation names an accumulated cost that dulls the sensorial, affective, and creative capacities of the worker, as well as the loss of a self and subjectivity not mediated by capitalist production. In this scheme, capitalist exploitation disables the worker in mind and body. As the familiar story goes, the worker toils and toils unto death. This is the protracted violence of capitalism—the exchange of many vitalities for the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the few.

For Marx, “labor is the living, form-giving fire.”° Thus, the concept of labor cannot be reduced to sheer productive labor, nor use value to exchange value. As a concept it maintains the qualities of capacity, creation, and potential that characterize use value. This idea of living labor stands in opposition to productive labor. Marx writes, “Capital is dead labor, which vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks.”° Here, capital thrives on the dispossession of living labor. Yet, in the context of athletic ability, which also becomes embodied cultural capital, capital isn’t as easily understood as “dead labor” and capitalism was not just a process of objectification that only dulls the senses. In some ways, basketball became a technology that allowed for vacillation between the dispossession and rejuvenation of living labor. Life as a basketball player entailed the dispossession of living labor through things like fatigue, injury, and emotion work. But in another way, their play might have also rejuvenated their capacity for living labor through things like healthy exercise, travelling
and team camaraderie. Here, the body is not just one that expends or is emptied of its labor and power via athletic performance. Rather, the social and phenomenological experience of playing basketball generates surplus and sharpens senses. For example, networks of affective relations formed between players, between teams, amongst audience members, between audiences and players, and between people and places. These attachments were not always based on affinity but also included antagonisms of race, nation, and class. Also, the opportunity to have these experiences also became an asset, a type of capital itself. As an asset it was distinctly tied to being able-bodied and all the symbolism that was invested in having exceptional athletic abilities.

Living labor is, in an essence, how Marx understands power. Thus, living labor as “labor power in action” entails agency, life force, vitality, and creative capacity. It is also the resource that is drained in the alienation that occurs in the toil of waged work. But it is also the resource that can exceed the grasp of capital. As feminist Marxist scholar Kathi Weeks writes:

conceived as collective and creative human capacity harnessed by capital to the production of surplus value, living labor can yield both a critical standpoint from which the alienating and exploitative conditions of modern work can be critically interrogated and a utopian potential that can inform speculations about the revolutionary transformation of those conditions.95

Capital is thus parasitic to living labor. Because of the way living labor exists in surplus to this capitalist extraction even as it becomes the material of surplus extraction, scholars have taken up this concept of “living labor” and investigated its biopolitical nature. Among others, scholars working in the Italian Marxist tradition such as Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Maurizio Lazzarato, and Bruno Gullì have engaged the relationship between living labor and biopolitics.
Bruno Gullì notes the difference between productive labor and the “subjective, productive, power of labor” and that “productive labor pertains to the discourse of political economy; living labor is an ontological category - although it represents the same force that political economy turns into productive labor.” 96 Clarifying the distinction further, Gullì states, “under capital, productive labor is only that which produces and valorizes capital. However, the subjective power of labor is a productive power insofar as the word “productive” is taken in its broadest and most original sense, as poieses - then, it is the same as the word ‘creative.’” 97 Productive labor names the application of labor’s creative potential to a capitalist system, but labor’s productive capacity extends much further and much more holistically throughout the human condition.

Relating this concept of living labor to the field of athletics helps make visible the modes of ability that are invested in the concept of labor power itself. Marxist scholars have turned to the idea of living labor in part due to its revolutionary potential, namely its capacity to exist in and persist beyond capitalist social relations. The terms used to describe living labor, phrases like creative human capacity, poiesis, power in action, all signal a certain element of ability and its future tense corollary, capacity. For Marx, it is this element of ability and capacity, or capability, that sets humans apart from other creatures; they have an ability to make use of their surroundings and resources, and in so doing they make use-value. 98 This paired with the debilitating nature of alienation in capitalism means that the materialist concept of living labor is partially invested with the desire of physical ability at its core.

Simply put, athletic labor looks quite different from that which occurs on the factory. Sports, while they entail forms of bodily alienation and overuse, also remain linked to recreation, health, and a reconnection with the sensuous world. Athletic activity expresses living labor, or as Weeks put it, “collective and creative human capacity,” which is quite viscerally experienced.
Team sports like basketball offer these aspects in concert with others, a mode of collectivization that might extend out to spectators. This is what makes athletics and athleticism such an interesting and provocative example of living labor. Yet, while women’s basketball straddled the distinction between work and leisure, these women accessed this kind of cultural capital through physical ability, beauty appeal, and social desirability.

As a concept, living labor also provides a language to connect paid and unpaid athletic labor under a Marxist rubric of production, and in doing so creates a means to account for the kinds of relationalities that are produced among athletes, audiences, and environments without reducing them to capitalist metrics of compensation and exchange. At the same time, much of the theoretical optimism around the concept of living labor is vested in hope for agency, capacity, and creation to reach toward revolutionary ambition. While this is important, this optimism carries with it an element of seductive able-bodiedness. In this dynamic, sharp theoretical insights from disability studies, namely the logics of ability and disability that infuse inequalities of race, class, and gender, provide a helpful theoretical axis to temper some of the radical ambition invested in the concept of living labor.

Kathi Weeks offers the reminder that “what counts as work, which forms of productive activity will be included and how each will be valued, are a matter of historical dispute.” 99 Weeks argues that work and the value it produces are historically contingent. Keeping this in mind, the US postindustrial economy looks much different from the industrial one. In general terms, the industrial economy was characterized by Fordism. Fordism implies standardized mass production and consumption, liberal welfare state, assembly line organization allowing for unskilled labor, vertical infrastructure, working wages that allow for consumerism on the part of workers. The factory was the most iconic symbol of Fordism. By the 1970s, the constant growth
of capital accumulation slowed, relations of production shifted, and global financial crisis followed. A new era of US postindustrial life or post-Fordism became hegemonic. This period, which many argue still dominates today, entailed a shift away from the production of goods toward more immaterial production of services, information or data, global and horizontal infrastructure, neoliberal governance, greater technological capacity, more flexible accumulation and speculation, and debt driven growth.

As an accumulative process, capitalism has become ever more invasive in translating what Federici called “life force” into work. Scholars have argued that immaterial, affective labor requires even greater use of living labor in the service of capitalist production than the earlier Fordist regime focused primarily on the production of goods. The production of immaterial commodities like “a smile, a mood, a feeling, or a relationship” is more pronounced in the post-industrial era. However, this observation often relies on a juxtaposition of the industrial era as dominantly characterized by a different system of production focused on interchangeable workers, the production of material goods, an emphasis on manual or physical work over mental work. While this is true, it would be a mistake to insinuate that the industrial era was devoid of these kinds of affective production. Yet, sometimes affective or immaterial forms of labor are articulated as a distinctly post-Fordist phenomenon. As Lazzarato reiterates, “immaterial labor appears as a real mutation of ‘living labor.’ Here we are quite far from the Taylorist model of organization.” Relatedly, Adkins argues:

The demand that workers now invest in all aspects of their lives as potential workplace assets is very often understood as concerning a collapse of the distinctions between intimate and working lives, home and work, production and social reproduction and between abstract and living labour. Indeed, the collapse of these distinctions is widely
located as a distinctly post-Fordist phenomenon evidenced in the rise and hegemony of affective and immaterial forms of labour, that is, in forms of labour which call on workers to open out their emotions, senses and feeling states to the labour process and which escape measure and calculation due to their live and lived qualities.\textsuperscript{103} These scholars highlight how the postindustrial US economy has meant that work and life are increasingly difficult to separate. Workers sell not only their laboring capacity but their whole selves “because capitalism seeks to involve even the worker's personality and subjectivity within the production of value.”\textsuperscript{104} Work requires more and more investment and management of the “whole” self as a form of human capital, and thus requires more of the total capacity for living labor. Adkins writes, “the figures of the independent contractor and the entrepreneur have emerged as the ideal workers of post-Fordism. These are workers who invest in their own human capital, contract out their own labour and take on the risks and costs of such investments and of contracting themselves, as well as the risks and costs of their whole lives and life-times.”\textsuperscript{105} With similar sentiment, Daniel Just writes, “the current blurring of work’s temporal and spatial boundaries – the fact that work is no longer tied to given working hours and designated workplaces, but has instead spread throughout society and into what used to be leisure time and one’s life outside of one’s job – is an outcome of wide changes in material and social life.”\textsuperscript{106} Yet, this perspective risks missing the influential presence of immaterial and affective labor at the emergence of mass leisure and recreation in the early part of the twentieth century in the United States.

Upon my investigation, it seems apparent that barnstormer and industrial company women basketball players occupy gendered labor positions that actually seem quite similar to some of the kinds of service based affective work that characterizes post-industrial life in much
of the West. In the case of industrial sponsored teams, their work as athletes and entertainers far exceeded their job titles as secretaries, clerks, or factory shop workers. In the case of barnstormers, they could be considered independent contractors and entrepreneurs, they were paid by the job and their athletic careers were rarely secured. As much as competing to win, these women worked to put on a spectacle that involved the kind of exhibition and spectacle that could solicit and elicit enjoyment.

The history of women’s sporting experience in the United States is a useful site from which to assess changes in gendered industrial labor as well as the relationship between industrial and post-industrial working life. While immaterial production dominates much the postindustrial US economy, the example of industrial women’s basketball shows how these qualities also existed in the Fordist era in the midst of burgeoning leisure economy. This is not to say the characterization of Fordist economy is wrong, but it is rather to draw attention to the characteristics of postindustrial economy that were pre-emergent and yet co-present in industrial life. In this vein, I follow Raymond Williams’ methodological call to pay attention to “structures of feeling” when observing cultural phenomena. Williams associates structures of feeling with a “social experience still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social.”107 Attention to structures that facilitate the emergence of new kinds of feeling invariably occurs between the production of official and hegemonic discourse and popular rearticulation or appropriation. The emphasis on feeling over cognition emphasizes less tangible but no less material cultural effects lodged within a particular socio-historic moment. Williams privileges literature and art as cultural phenomena that express changes of presence that “do not have to await definition, classification and set effective limits on experience and action.”108 Yet, the concept of structures of feeling is appropriate for this study of women’s basketball play as a physical yet immaterial
and affective form of labor. This is to say, sporting histories, as performances of living and productive labor, require particular kinds of bodily comportment, as well as connections between people. They are thus fruitful sites from which to observe shifts and transformations in ideological and economic structures.

**Conclusion**

Early women’s basketball is a useful and dynamic prism from which to explore capitalist sensibilities as they relate to the manifestation of economies and subjects through the logic of ability. To highlight this relationship, I traced how basketball became a form of labor for some industrial era women workers. This occurred in uneven ways. First, I reviewed the emergence of industrial athletics and their relation to dominant paradigms of economic efficiency and then sketched the development of increasingly competitive women’s basketball and the specialization of it as a form of labor. Two primary avenues of paid labor, namely industrial company sponsored teams and independent barnstorming exhibition teams emerged as the primary way women’s athletic ability was marketized through the technology of basketball.

This exploration of industrial era women’s basketball and its emergence through employer-sponsored recreation and later as entrepreneurial enterprise reveals a cultural phenomenon rarely mentioned in both the US history of industrial women workers and the history of professional sports. As much as physical education programs, industrial employers and barnstorming outfits laid the infrastructure for the popularization of women’s basketball throughout the United States. In particular, these commercialized avenues generated access for more working and middle-class women. The opportunity to play basketball was both cultivated and restricted by athletic ability. While very few women were able to take advantage of these
opportunities, basketball did grant these women privileges, like extra income, travel, and popular notoriety.

By looking at this example of women’s gendered labor in the industrial era, we can see the way athletic ability categorized gender as a labor division in the way it gathers labors that include the use of physical skill, strength, stamina but also sex appeal, sociability, and other kinds of affective work. By expanding our understanding of labor involved in the cultivation and performance of athletic ability and by assessing the ableist logics of capability (ability and capacity) that underline the concept of labor in and supposedly beyond capitalism, this case study of women’s basketball in the industrial setting exposes the way gender difference is sedimented through class position and through specific kinds of labor. The instance of professional women’s basketball is helpful because it demonstrates the way that ableism also marked gendered labor. Insightful Marxist approaches to labor and production as two fundamental concepts in the critical analysis of capitalism’s dehumanizing effects sometimes presume a radical potential of living labor that is still hinged to ableism. In this oversight, they miss the extent to which regimes of biopolitical management make life forces, or vitality, productive. In addressing the way athletic ability became a form of cultural capital, I show that the increasing dispossession of living labor was actually quite apparent in the industrial era. While I agree this trend has only become more pronounced and pervasive, women’s athletic ability and its expression in physical culture helps elucidate a structure of feeling wherein gender was becoming segmented by the politics of ability. Given the contemporary aegis wherein gender self-determination is also expressed as a form of ability, namely the ability to be the gender one chooses, and gender also carves up populations on the basis of labor, or productive
activity, this historical case is particularly insightful for historicizing the triangulation of gender, labor, and ability.
Notes


9 Christina Lee et al, “2015 Employee Benefits: An Overview of Employee Benefits Offerings in the US,” Society for Human Resource Management, June 2015. According to the report, in 2008, 58% of corporate companies offered some kind of health and wellness incentive to employees. By 2015 that number has risen to almost 70%. These programs provide preventive health incentives to employees in a variety of ways. They do this in the service of work satisfaction with the ultimate goal of company success. They can include health risk related discounts, fitness challenges, weight loss competitions, smoking cessation and stress reduction programs. In 1960, 50% of jobs required moderate physical activity but that number has fallen to only 20% in 2011. Many people no longer work in factories but in restaurants, hospitals, and office cubicles. Employees report more sedentary and stressful lives in and out of work. Corporate companies have started to include employee wellness as an important part of workplace culture. Large companies in data and technology industries now sponsor free healthy snacks, nap rooms, and recreational sports teams. These corporate wellness incentives seem to be an emergent feature of human relations management aligned with the early 2000s information technology sector’s massive growth and its subsequent influence on corporate workplace norms, but the history of corporate welfare extends long before this period.

10 Ben Carrington and Ian McDonald, Marxism, Cultural Studies and Sport (New York: Routledge, 2009), 17.


12 See the following call for papers: https://networks.h-net.org/node/73374/announcements/137259/cfp-journal-sport-and-social-issues-consuming-athletic-labor


Putting vicious necessary that and make president “leisure 27 26 25

“Remember When Knitting Was Girl’s Big Sport,” Chicago Daily Tribune (Chicago, IL), Jul. 22, 1934.


A number of smaller colleges and technical schools fielded women’s teams despite the campaign to suppress women’s college athletics. These school-based teams were often in more rural areas but they also played industrial teams, perhaps due to the lack of competition.


Wilfrid Smith, “Chicago Pro Cagers Lose Opener, 15 to 14,” Chicago Daily Tribune (Chicago, IL), Nov. 28, 1929.


Chicago Recreation Survey Volume 2, 70.

Caylef, Babe, 106.

Dorothy Schaper, ”Industrial Recreation for Women,” American Physical Education Review 27, no. 3 (1922). In Schaper’s national survey of 51 industrial companies, she reiterates Charles Frederick Weller’s sentiment that “leisure is now the greatest unworked mine of social and industrial power” (109). Schaper quotes Joseph Lee, president of the Community Service Board in New York City, who likened workers to water power said “When you make use of water power you put part of your water through your mill but you don’t try to put the whole river through. You leave some of it to go over the damn and follow its natural channel. If you did not do so, the river in time of freset would carry your will with it out to sea” (109). This metaphor likens water power to the vital energy and labor capacity of US workers. Trying to draw too much from them would spell disaster for the factory. All of that worker power would threaten to overrun management control of labor relations. Schaper writes, “it is therefore necessary for concerns to provide wholesome pastimes and diversions which are just as easily available as the vicious pleasures and just as interesting: sport and plays and games are a ready and relatively inexpensive agency for putting wholesome and diversions in the way of the worker” (109).
In 1932, the Communist Party hosted its own counter Olympics in Chicago. For more on this, see: William J. Baker, “Muscular Marxism and the Chicago Counter-Olympics of 1932” in The New American Sport History: Recent Approaches and Perspectives, ed. Steven Pope (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997.)


Nathan, “Aid to Trade,” 13. He states, “the heads of the departments declare that the athletic movement perfected by the officials has succeeded in doubling the efficiency of the different staffs of workers under their immediate charge”.

Nathan, “Aid to Trade,” 16.

It is interesting to note that Fredrick Winslow Taylor was an athlete who played tennis and Olympic golf.


Costa and Guthrie, Women and Sport, 119.

Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Welfare Work for Employees in Industrial Establishments in the United States,” United States Department of Labor, 1919. This 1919 report references racial disparities within corporate welfare and recreations. For example, “some of the mining communities in Arizona in which the common labor is chiefly Mexican, where companies provide very good clubhouses for their American employees but make no provision for the entertainment of the ordinary laborers. The club dues in some of these cases are in themselves prohibitive, being as much as $25 per year. Some mines in other sections of the country report that the clubhouses are open to, and are used by, all classes of white employees. One company with many Negro employees has a club, run on the principles of the Y. M. C. A., but financed and managed by the company, in which club facilities are provided on separate floors of the club building for the colored and white employees and their families. Another company employing about 2,400 men has three clubs, one for American employees, one for foreigners, and one for the Negro employees. The first club began in a small way, but has outgrown two buildings, and now occupies a well-equipped clubhouse. The club holds many entertainments and excursions and encourages athletics, having good baseball, basket ball, and bowling” (76).


Miller, “Growing Need,” 43.


49 Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 94.

50 Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 95.


55 Ikard, *Just for Fun*, 32.

56 Reeder, *Dust Bowl Girls*, 221-222.


60 Harland Rohm, “194 Games Won and 9 Lost; That's Trunks' 8 Year Record,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Dec. 7, 1929.


62 “Basketball Returns to the Front Line Trenches; Many Empty Seats Greet Sport,” *The Chicago Defender* (Chicago, IL), Jan. 14, 1933. While barnstorming was most robust in the years proceeding World War II, early barnstorming teams formed in the 1920s and even continued to play into the 1930s in the midst of ongoing economic distress. By 1933, men’s games that used to draw up to ten thousand spectators barely drew two thousand. Unfortunately, there was “little encouragement for the promotion of the sport and ballroom managers where the games are played are worried sick over its lack of pull”46. Touring teams had to seek out new and smaller venues during this period of contraction. Yet, women’s teams still remained active during this period and by the mid-thirties a number of teams were well known as barnstorming outfits.


65 “Rather Novel Indeed,” *The Chicago Defender* (Chicago, IL), May 20, 1933.


“Dick Hudson Is Back From Tour,” *The Chicago Defender* (Chicago, IL), Apr. 17, 1937.


Molina, *Barnstorming America*, 16.


Pruter, “Tidye Pickett,” 256.
Use value names the productive utility of some activity or object. Uses are qualitatively different and limited in scope. Exchange values name the value that an activity or an object has in relation to another object or activity. Thus, two qualitatively different use values can be drawn into comparative relation with one another through a process of calculating their exchange value. Exchange values are abstractions. Two substantively different things can be compared as qualitatively different in order of magnitude. Exchange value becomes the “form of appearance” or the expression of this relation in difference. Correspondingly, surplus value is derived from translation of productive labor into an exchange value commensurate with a wage. In this framework, surplus value is proportionately related to the amount of profit derived through exploitation of the worker. This is to say the surplus is acquired through the devaluation of productive labor. By definition, workers do more than they are paid to do. Thus, value is a representation realized in the process of production that requires the extraction of surplus labor from the worker over and above what Marx called socially “necessary labor time” (Capital 293). He writes, “The rate of surplus value is... an exact expression for the degree of exploitation of labor-power by capital, or of the worker by the capitalist” (Capital 326). Surplus extraction entails not only the labor of a day’s work but also all future capacity to perform. Marx writes, “By labor-power or capacity for labor is to be understood the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description” (343). Interestingly, Marx and Foucault share this assessment of power as not only ability, but capacity, or the potential for ability in the future as well. In different ways, they both articulate the way productivity is the central element of power.


Gullì, Labor of Fire, 61.
Marx, *Capital Volume 1*, 126.


Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” 139. Professional sports aren't as readily substituted by automation labor like other forms of consumer-based services.


Chapter 4: The Historical Geography of Chicago Women’s Basketball

Introduction

This chapter takes a different approach than most of the published histories of women’s basketball by reconstructing the historical geography on women’s basketball in Chicago during the 1920s and 1930s. By mapping a constellation of popular venues, I begin to address the missing question of “where” that has taken a backseat to the equally important question of “who” with respect to the early twentieth-century cultural phenomena of women’s basketball. In this work, I am concerned primarily with the limits and possibilities that are engendered by regimes of athletic ability that are wielded across a biopolitical spectrum. With respect to this study on the biopolitics of basketball, spatial organization is as crucial as the organization of bodies and people groups to understanding how athletic ability was reproduced as valuable. Within this dynamic, the playing environment actively influences how this unfolds. Chicago provides an ideal case study because it was a vibrant hub for urban cultural production, industrial transformation, migration, and race and gender-based struggles over citizenship and public life. In Chicago, the playing environment emerged out of the uneven spatial hierarchies of poverty, gendered publics, and racial segregation. At the same time, the cultural and communal activity of basketball shaped opportunities for the contestation of these dynamics. With this in mind, I explore the spatial distribution of basketball venues that were used for mass participation and mass spectatorship throughout the city of Chicago. Then, I place this historical geography in the context of cultural struggles over the geopolitics of race and gender that unfold in urban place-making.

By and large, sports history has focused on the history of athletes, teams and events with less attention devoted to the spaces of play and the way these spaces also constitute historical
significance. With respect to women’s basketball, historians have anchored their investigations in basketball teams, organizations, or institutions. Of these, only a few have explored basketball in relation to issues of place. Some have addressed the development of women’s basketball as a national pastime¹ or within individual US states or regions.² A few have addressed urban publics and community formations, but even these have not foregrounded questions about how place and environment shape cultural limits and possibilities.³ Little is known about the places where women’s basketball was played and how these locations influenced team and audience experience as well as cultural publics, flows and networks within these areas.

The scholarly tradition of human geography contests the characterization of space as a vacuous, passive stage for human interaction instead favoring a more dynamic and lively influence of lived environment. Sports geographers have demonstrated that thinking about space as it relates to sports is particularly insightful for understanding the power relations as they unfold in culture.⁴ In the mapping work of this chapter, I am primarily concerned with the question of place and the way place becomes “heterotopian”, in a Foucauldian sense, through shared and contested meanings.⁵ Tim Cresswell clarifies, “place is not just a thing in the world, but a way of understanding the world.”⁶ Cresswell builds on John Agnew’s definition of place as comprising three elements: location, locale, and sense of place. In this way, a notion of place includes, a specific location, a locale and associated activities and characteristics, and the subjective and emotional attachments that people have.⁷ Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopia and heterotopology overlaid on the initial concept of place as described above effectively describes the central tension that this historical geography maps out. Foucault writes, “we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of
relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another.”⁸ In this way, heterotopia refers to the uneven differential relationalities that create ontological and epistemological alterities which are co-existent with power regimes and their surpluses. The Encyclopedia of Urban Studies reiterates, “heterotopia is foremost an ambiguous, variable, and dynamic site that incites (re-) consideration and (re-) negotiation of sociospatial norms.”⁹

As such, my mapping project includes the straightforward placing of venues in their historical locations, or literally geocoding their locations on historical street geometry. It also includes accounting for the neighborhood demography and other uses that constitute these locations to give a sense of their locales. And finally, by narrativizing the events and experiences associated with these venues, I gather and present a sense of place that is intimately linked to struggles over race and gender. In addition to a historical geography of basketball’s place in Chicago, this mapping enacts a heterotopology in the way it sketches differential how sociospatial orders are renegotiated through the politics of athletic ability that promote mobility in the same places where social mobilities were policed (in the case of armories). Foucault writes, “heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable.”¹⁰ While this opening and closing signals the radical potential of a heterotopia, I recenter the politics of athletic ability which also pose limits on the basis of racialized gender and productive labor.

Basketball became routinized throughout US communities by the forces of education and industry. By the 1920s and 1930s, it was already familiar to many. The game culturally imprinted on the bodies and minds of those who grew to love it but also upon the social landscapes where it was played. Grundy, Nelson and Dyreson note:
During the 1920s and 1930s, the Friday night ritual of a girls’ basketball game followed by a boy’s contest became an institution in communities around the country. As seasons began to pile one on another, the sport began to generate rhythms, habits, legends and traditions that cemented it in peoples’ lives and imaginations, making basketball a central theme in the stories that communities told themselves about themselves. Importantly, basketball became a technology through which people groups told their histories of struggle and also played out socio-spatial struggles in real time. Uncovering this history takes us on a journey through dance halls, casinos, arenas, and armories, school gymnasiums, churches, fieldhouses, through private and public spaces, across cities and towns, and even countries.

In Chicago, women’s basketball was no small phenomenon. It was perhaps the most popular and prominent athletic activity for girls and women. While boys and men also played hockey, baseball and football, basketball was one of the rare team sports on offer to girls and women. According to M. Ann Hall, “During the 1920s and 1930s, the city of Chicago was a hotbed of women’s basketball. In fact, by 1926 there were more than 100 teams organized into nine leagues.” Chicago saw the proliferation of youth, amateur, semi-professional, and professional basketball in part due to widespread interest in participation and spectatorship. The constellated efforts of church and community clubs, industrial business, schools and entrepreneurs supported growth while existing spatial infrastructure provided a catalyst to the formation of cultural publics organized around sports. One would assume the Great Depression stymied public recreation and leisure. Yet, even during its worst years, between 1930 and 1933, newspaper accounts still reported on women’s basketball games played in front of thousands in some of the city’s most recognizable landmarks.
In Chicago, community-based basketball, like the kind sponsored by local churches, settlements, and YMCA’s, built affinity across different communities and stabilized the cultural bonds between working- and middle-class people. Many of these organizations supported community uplift and progress through sports. They used basketball as a way to mitigate some of the race and class-based tensions that were curdling up in industrial Chicago. Those community-based affinities also helped to generate excitement and identification with home teams. These teams went on to represent their local communities throughout the city and laid the groundwork for the burgeoning commercialization of basketball as a leisure activity experienced not only through play but also through spectatorship as well.

Unlike the professional arenas we see today, mass spectator events took place in a motley variety of places. Namely, casinos, dancehalls, and armories provided colorful locations for basketball games as they became intermingled with other kinds of entertainment like dancing and music. Higher profile women’s games occurred in the following sites: the Broadway Armory, 8th Regiment Armory, Park Casino, Rainbow Fronton, Arcadia Gardens, Savoy Ballroom, White City Amusement Park, Chicago Stadium, and Loyola Gymnasium. Chicago’s armories and commercial entertainment venues have divergent histories but both kinds became important landmarks in the history of women's basketball. Armories were erected to support the activities of the National Guard and state security apparatus. Amidst reverberations of war, armories served the interests of both state and capital power by mobilizing militias to secure geopolitical order, both locally and globally. But, they were also huge and could accommodate large consumer audiences. Other venues like the Park Casino and Savoy Ballroom were established for music and dancing, activities that promoted the mingling of different social groups.
In short, the spatial order of the city relied on the segregation of people by race, class, gender, and ethnicity. Yet, basketball was an activity that brought different groups of people into contact, and thus challenged this order even as it echoed the logic of hierarchy through sporting competition. For girls and women, basketball provided a means to access public space and travel about the city, thereby increasing physical mobility on two fronts which included the body’s range of motion through exercise, but also a person’s range of motion in a city space marked by hierarchy and uneven socio-spatial relations. Thus, these athletes were one group of people who sometimes defied de facto segregation and restricted movement in Chicago. Although this defiance was temporary, it was significant. Mapping how women’s basketball unfolded in city space demonstrates how spatial boundaries are both contested and reiterated through physical culture.

The forthcoming analysis of public basketball culture in Chicago provides a dynamic account of the way sports become a territory of struggles over freedom, particularly freedom of movement, along various scales. In this focus on large and popular events, I draw attention to various iterations of freedom of movement. They include the freedom to play in the assigned court, the freedom to travel to in and across the city, the freedom to reside in different areas of the city, the racialized and gendered restrictions to or requirements for movement, as well as migrations to and from Chicago that were imbricated in the global politics of capitalism and empire. These early public spectacles were occasioned through the co-presence of race- and sex-based differences which played out not only on bodies but in patterns of movement throughout urban space.

This analysis also spatializes the body. Here, the body is not just an actor in the scene but also a topos for imaginaries built around ethnic and gendered signifiers that can be seen in the
popularity of “freak teams” that drew on primitive, cosmopolitan and exotic tropes. In doing so, I explore how socio-spatial relations activate public spectacles for the contestation or disruption of racial and gendered social orders through cultural encounters and mobilities that involved competition across race and sex categories. At the same time, these contests were limited in their ability to do so. This limited potential rests in part on the investments in athletic ability as a requisite to social mobility.

Finally, highlighting the example of two armories, I chart these dynamics to argue that state sanctioned violence is contiguous to the leisure and spectatorship of basketball, not it’s opposite. Contiguity here implies that the two touch each other, not only in symbolic imaginaries but in the built environment and across physical bodies. Building on scholarship about racialized gender and sexuality in urban cultural publics, I frame women’s basketball as a “contiguous zone” to highlight the way women’s games were not a supplementary adjunct to the more important men’s games, but rather women’s able-bodied performance of race and gender directly influenced struggles over hierarchically organized urban publics. As a contiguous zone, women’s basketball grounded in particular locations created opportunities for disruption and resolution of dominant spatial and social orders but did so through recourse to the spectacle of boundary crossing made possible through community investment in athletic ability.

**Placing Basketball in Chicago**

Surviving the Great Fire of 1871 and a nation-wide depression from 1873 to 1878, Chicago entered the twentieth century in a surge of growth. By 1900, Chicago was the 5th largest city in the world and by 1930 it had dropped to the 8th largest, but still remained the 2nd largest US city. Much of this growth can be attributed to migration. The city was an oasis for Great Migration resettlement. At the same time, waves of international immigration as millions
moved to find work. These migrants would find work in manufacturing and construction sectors. In 1900, almost 35% of the city population was foreign born but by 1930, this dropped to 25% foreign born. Between 1910 and 1930, Chicago’s African American population grew from about 44,000 to about 234,000 people. By the 1920s and 1930s the city was infamously segregated, and labor and race based conflict reverberated in the ebbs and flows of military and economic activity on a global scale. For example, the city’s Black community was largely confined to a corridor of residences on the South Side, what St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton later described as a “a narrow tongue of land, seven miles in length and one and one-half miles in width” that comprised the majority of Black Metropolis. During and directly after the World War I economic boon, workers also benefitted from war time production increases and the economic opportunities that came with them. Fewer working hours and more disposable income led to more consumer activity and an increased in public leisure and recreation. Chicago’s political and economic milieu also created a cultural landscape influenced by formal and informal industry, particularly illegal syndicates that supported leisure forms oriented around vice. Vice economies often involved alcohol, dancing, sex work, and gambling. Sports were seen as both a corollary to vice, particularly through sports spectatorship, as well as a wholesome and healthy alternative to it.

Given its size and developing urban infrastructure, Chicago was inspired by many forms of popular leisure. Chicago based sports manufactures benefitted from the proximity of the meatpacking industry which provided leather and hides for goods like sports equipment. Notably, two major companies, A.G. Spalding & Brothers and Wilson Sporting Goods, were based out of Chicago and helped to sediment sporting culture in the area. Gerald Gems’ *Windy
City Wars documents how sports were a major feature in Chicago’s industrial landscape and helped to reproduce social affinities as well as social distinctions throughout the city.21

Women’s sports increasingly became more visible with the popularization of bowling, field sports, swimming, and basketball. Among these, basketball was quite popular. It required little more than a hoop and a ball, could be played indoors or outdoors, and as a team sport, it worked well for groups. The appropriation of facilities for sporting events occurred in parallel with organized recruitment of participants. A number of entities throughout the city contributed to the popularization of women’s basketball. They include the Board of Education, Park District, the Illinois National Guard, a number of churches, social service organizations, colleges, corporate sponsors, and entrepreneurial promoters. Some of these efforts were geared toward increasing mass participation; others were more invested in fostering a commercial public that would participate as spectators and fans of higher profile competitive teams.

In addition to Chicago’s status as an industrial behemoth, the robust historical record by social researchers in the city provides another good reason to conduct this inquiry into women’s basketball geography. Influential urban planning and sociological projects guided by universities and city commissions turned the city into a living source of data for social science. For example, the Chicago School of Sociology, in particular the Social Science Research Committee (SSRC), devoted itself to the study of urban ecology and the social organization of the city. This research committee sponsored a number of urban studies in an attempt to render a scientific sociological approach to urban life and organization. Over the years, university sponsored organizations like the SSRC produced a number of surveys and mapping projects that, while suspect in their liberal ideology of urban pathology, nevertheless left a rich archive. Two such projects, the Community
Area Factbook and the Chicago Recreation Survey, provide much of the data on the locations and characteristics of popular basketball venues.

The comprehensive Local Community Fact Book project began in 1938 under the editorship of Louis Wirth and Margaret Furez. In 1910, Chicago began using census tracts and starting in 1920, members of the University of Chicago Local Community Research Committee started to gather additional demographic data and worked with the Chicago Department of Health to divide the city into community areas. The first Local Community Fact Book on Chicagoland neighborhoods was prepared for the Chicago Recreation Commission with assistance from the Social Science Research Committee of the University of Chicago, Works Progress Administration, National Youth Administration, Federal Writers Project, and the Illinois State Planning Commission. Fittingly, the goal of the Fact Book was to provide “a compendium of reliable information, as an index of local community life, as a measure for dealing more effectively with local problems, and as a basis for the formulation of more enlightened programs and policies.”

The Local Community Fact Book project provided snapshot maps and demography from 75 community areas that were established by sociologists on the basis of distinct and lived boundaries that incorporated 1930 US census and Chicago’s 1934 special census data. These interrelated neighborhood areas were characterized by social homogeneity on the basis of 4 factors: 1) settlement, growth and history, 2) local trade area, 3) distribution of membership and attendance of local institutions, and 4) natural or artificial barriers. This Community Area Fact Book includes extensive data including population distribution variables that range from age, employment and occupation, sex, ethnicity, race, and citizenship status, literacy, number of births, number of normal and broken families, and even
rates of insanity, delinquency, and schizophrenia within the area. In addition, building data such as number of churches, schools, movie theaters and dwellings are included.

Additionally, in 1934 Mayor Edward Kelley commissioned a Chicago Recreation Committee that consisted for 40 appointed members with the goal of creating “a clearing house for information on recreation in Chicago and as an advisory body for city planning of recreation.” Among other activities, this Chicago Recreation Committee sponsored a comprehensive survey of recreation throughout the city. The project proposed “a comprehensive study of all public, private and commercial recreational facilities and leisure time opportunities as a phase of community life, with consideration of their social implications. Social implications included the relations of the recreational set up to population, housing, commerce and industry, transportation and accidents, crime and delinquency.” The study was published in five volumes from 1937 to 1940 and was conducted with technical support and staff from Northwestern University’s Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work departments, as well as workers and supplies, and assistance from the Works Progress Administration, National Youth Administration, and the Illinois Emergency Relief Commission. The overall survey was divided into 200 to 300 page volumes that explored public, commercial, and private recreation. The Chicago Recreation Survey provided a comprehensive picture of what activities Chicagoans partook in as well as where these activities took place throughout the city. Attention was given to topics ranging from parks and facilities, vice and prostitution, theater and entertainment as well as community and church institutions. Entire sections of each volume were devoted to sports as they emerged in public, private and commercial recreation.

While both these projects provide important geographical data, I look to newspapers for context for events and teams of note. More specifically, the Chicago Daily Tribune and the
Chicago Defender provide information on important historical events related to the basketball in the city.28 The Chicago Daily Tribune was a daily newspaper under conservative editorship that circulated throughout the city. The Chicago Defender was the country’s leading Black newspaper with national circulation. These newspapers provide most of the information about when and where specific games were played, as well as who the city’s most prominent teams were. Often, only dates, times and game locations and outcomes were provided. This information usually appeared sandwiched in articles about men’s basketball or other sports columns. On occasion, an article would profile a women’s match giving a full account of the event with statistics and commentary. Both the Chicago Tribune and the Chicago Defender employed sports writers who took interest in highlighting women’s basketball as an adjunct to men’s. Notably, Harland Rohm reported on women’s games throughout the 1920’s, following the Taylor Trunks and IWAC (Illinois Women’s Athletic Club) Brownies with particular interest. Frank A. Young, the Chicago Defender’s first sports editor and later managing editor, wrote a weekly column titled, “FAY Says.” From time to time, Young covered women’s church and commercial teams who hailed from Chicago’s African American community.

Together with the Local Community Fact Book and Recreation Survey, this bevy of articles from 1920 to 1939 provide pieces of a patchwork mosaic to fill in a picture of what these venues and surrounding neighborhoods were like during this historical period.29 Many pieces are still missing, but this project extends a first attempt to bring them together as a composite picture. In cataloging and organizing this milieu, I found six major venue types. They were armories, community centers, college gymnasiums, commercial businesses, parks and religious institutions (see Figure 4). I found it useful to distinguish these spaces as promoting cultures of mass participation or mass spectatorship. Venues that were popular for mass participation like
community centers, religious sites, and parks often accommodated school or community based teams and were generally smaller. Yet, venues assigned for mass spectatorships like college venues, armories or commercial businesses were large enough to accommodate crowds in the hundreds and thousands. Most of these venues tended to be located closer to the lakefront area and dense population centers in the city.

**Figure 4: 1920’s-1930’s Women’s Basketball Venues by Type in Chicago’s Community Areas**

Sources: IPMUS NHGIS, University of Chicago Map Collection, Chicago Defender, Chicago Daily Tribune
Community Building and Mass Participation

In the twenty years between 1920 and 1940, basketball steadily grew in popularity. The Recreation Committee articulated the prominence of basketball in the city’s community groups: most of the YMCA’s, settlements and other organizations with indoor athletic courts report that basketball leagues and tournaments alone could easily overtax their gymnasium accommodations in the evening hours. In the analysis of church recreation in Chicago it was found that basketball is by far the most predominant indoor sport. Not only are church gymnasiums used for athletic groups belonging to the individual church, but frequently leagues and tournament revolve around various churches. Those church groups with their own facilities are frequently entered Park District league and in tournaments of YMCA’s and other group agencies.30

With the onset of the Great Depression many athletic and recreational clubs had to “introduce rigid economies and to adjust their programs and activities to a declining income.”31 At the same time, the New Deal’s Works Progress Administration sponsored employment at many Chicagoland recreation sites. According to the Recreation Commission, “several Chicago WPA projects have served not only the public parks and playgrounds but also many private agencies” and the WPA sponsored “Chicago Leisure Time Service” provided an average of 700 workers to 360 social agencies, for operating gymnasiums, playgrounds, club rooms and vacant lot play.”32 The Great Depression surely delimited the growth of recreation generally and basketball specifically within the city. Nevertheless, there continued to be presence and support for women's basketball through the late 1920s and the early 1930s.

A network of religious institutions, community centers and ethnic clubs dotted the city’s cultural landscape and many of these took interest in basketball in an effort to maintain social
influence among younger generations and the working class. Community based efforts emphasized participation. In doing so, they also ensured the development of a cultural public interested in playing and watching basketball. Gerald Gems writes,

More often ethnic clubs, faced with the loss of youthful members to the athletic programs of schools, parks and playgrounds, turned to the wholesale adoption of American sport. Religious groups, too, formalized their sporting activities in the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) and the B’nai B’rith Youth Organization (BBYO) to attract and retain youth while averting the proselytizing of the Protestant YMCA. The maintenance of religious separation precluded full cultural unification, but it also reinforced the common bonds of sport. The process of amalgamation resulted in parallel sporting cultures that shared the same forms but held different values and meanings by race, ethnicity, class, gender and even religion.33 Chicagoland youth service and religious organizations like the YMCA, YWCA, Knights of Columbus, Catholic Youth Organization, and the Young Men’s and Women’s Hebrew Associations and the Black churches all fielded athletic teams as part of their programming. These organizations fostered their athletics programs with overlapping and differentiated goals. They used youth and adult sports as a means to assimilate newer white immigrants, to grow their religious constituencies, to foster racial pride and loyalty, and to shepherd non-union based working-class affinities under the guidance of middle class leadership.

Settlement homes, which mostly targeted toward working class recent immigrants, served local impoverished neighborhoods.34 They served as residences and provided the social infrastructure for uplift and assimilation through a diverse moral programming. Healthy recreation formed a part of this platform. Many settlement houses built facilities for athletics and
sponsored sports teams. Basketball teams represented their respective houses in city play.\textsuperscript{35} The Chicagoland YMCA and YWCA systems were also well developed and provided both a pool of players as well as facilities for women’s basketball. Like the settlement houses, YMCA and YWCA leadership were represented by a philanthropically oriented middle and upper class but served lower class populations. Individual YMCAs sponsored basketball teams as well as city wide tournaments and YWCAs, while less extensive in their facilities and programming, also sponsored women’s basketball.\textsuperscript{36}

Churches also operated schools, after school programs or vacation schools that offered sports to youth and adults.\textsuperscript{37} Catholic parish schools throughout the city also provided infrastructure for the growth of the game.\textsuperscript{38} Sports were a means to generate identification with church community and institution. The longstanding Catholic fraternal organization, Knights of Columbus and later the Catholic Youth Organization, founded in 1930, both sponsored youth athletics and developed city wide basketball leagues for boys and girls. The CYO sought to provide a “program of recreation so adequate, interesting and attractive that the youth of Chicago would have a desire to participate in no other.”\textsuperscript{39} In documenting the activities of the Catholic Youth Organizations, the Recreation Survey reported that, “Every boy who desires to participate in the CYO athletic program ‘must first undergo a thorough spiritual examination in which he is question regarding the practice of his religious duties and urged to go to confession and receive communion once a month’.”\textsuperscript{40} The same was likely true for girl participants. In 1933, the \textit{Chicago Tribune} reported that the CYO boasted “the largest organized basketball league in the world”\textsuperscript{41} and a “girls’ division of one hundred teams”.\textsuperscript{42} In the 1937-1938 season, basketball was the most popular athletic activity for CYO sponsored recreation with a total 10,268 youth participating.\textsuperscript{43}
Given the popularity of basketball as a modern American game associated with uplift and moral community building, it makes sense that many of these reported venues were located in neighborhoods with relatively high rates of recently immigrated families. Most community center or religious institution venues with white constituencies were located in areas with at least 50 percent foreign born white residents or adjacent to census tracks with at least 50 percent foreign born white residents (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Community Center and Religion Based Basketball Venues and Percentage of Foreign Born White Residents per 1930 Census Tract**
Almost all of Chicago’s Black community resided in the slender plot of land that included the Grand Boulevard, Washington Park and later Douglass and Kenwood, community areas. Based on the 1930 census, only a small percentage of the city’s overall Black resident population lived outside of these areas and most other census tracts contained less than 11 percent Black residents (see Figure 6). Chicago was extremely racially segregated at this time and even though Black people travelled throughout the city for work, they were largely residentially confined to the Black Metropolis. While this delimited peoples’ social mobility, it also contributed to a rich cultural, intellectual and civic environment, or a “city within a city,” that some have compared to the Harlem Renaissance.44

Expectedly, as reported by the Chicago Defender, most Black women’s basketball teams played in venues were located in this era. The Black churches, major beacons within Black Metropolis, also offered sports to their congregants. In fact, Black church teams were some of the earliest pre-cursors to Black women’s semi-professional squads. Chicagoland churches sponsored a number of leagues, such as the Young Ladies Cosmopolitan League, Union Church League, Sunday School League, and the All-American Athletic Club’s B.B. Church Loving Cup. The religious institutions relied on sports to cement their status in communities. While YMCA’s were popular sites for basketball play, Black Chicagoans really only had access to the Wabash Avenue YMCA, which in the spirit of the association’s mission, provided housing, vocational training for future jobs, healthcare, and moral recreation, including basketball, as a distraction from vice and sin. The Wabash Avenue YMCA was the only prominent center that was not explicitly a community-based church that hosted or sponsored women’s games in this neighborhood.
Mass Spectatorship and Playing with/across Race and Sex

While the majority of women's competition took place in smaller venues like church and YMCA gymnasiums, major events like championship games often took place in larger venues. A
few well-known teams also regularly played in these larger venues. The city’s armories and entertainment venues were rented out to meet the needs of larger audiences. These larger venues held capacities in the thousands and included some of the city’s largest buildings. Since there were no giant stadiums already set aside for sports spectatorship, armories, smaller professional arenas, ballrooms, and even an amusement park, became the major places where people came to see basketball played by men and women. Higher profile women’s games occurred in the following sites that were assigned for either military or commercial and cultural purposes: the Broadway Armory, 8th Regiment Armory, Park Casino, Rainbow Fronton, Arcadia Gardens, Savoy Ballroom, White City Amusement Park, the Chicago Stadium. The Broadway Armory was the most frequently reported site for higher profile white women’s games and the 8th Regiment Armory was the most frequently reported site for Black women’s games.

These large venues were located in areas with more rented properties than owned homes, as well as more Lakefront commercial property (see Figure 7). Relatedly, these neighborhoods contained a higher percentages of employed men and women even during the Great Depression (see Figure 8 and Figure 9). Interestingly, this likely meant that they were located in areas where relatively young working men, as well as either unmarried women workers or married women who couldn’t afford not to work lived. These people, particularly working men, would have had some kind of dispensable income to spend on leisure, like watching basketball or the other kinds of activities that occurred in these sites like music and dancing. But, they also would not have had the means or desire for home ownership in that area as rates of owned homes radiated away from the lakefront, which was also not coincidentally where higher percentages of US born white people with US born parentage lived too (see Figure 5).
Figure 7: Mass Spectatorship Venues and Percentage of Owned Homes per 1930 Census Tract

Sources: IPUMS NHGIS 1930 Census Dataset, Chicago Defender, Chicago Daily Tribune
Figure 8: Mass Spectatorship Venues and Percentage of Employed Men per 1930 Census Tract
Figure 9: Mass Spectatorship Venues and Percentage of Employed Women per Census Tract

Sources: IPUMS NHGIS 1930 Census Dataset, Chicago Defender, Chicago Daily Tribune
Many of these large venues were also located on major thoroughfares within the city like Broadway, Clark Street, Parkway, which later became Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, and Madison Street. This made them relatively accessible by streetcar and elevated train by those who had the means to travel. This meant that wealthier people with who lived outside those areas likely could have travelled to and from these places and the people who lived around these sites likely would have had, at the very least, familiarity with their location if not the events that transpired their regularly. Newspaper reporting in major publications like the Chicago Daily Tribune and the Chicago Defender would have assisted this cultural circulation as well.

In addition, many of these reported venues were located either in Black Metropolis or in relative proximity to Black Metropolis. Six of ten commercial or military venues that were mentioned in the surveyed press as having hosted women’s games were located either in neighborhoods with over 47 percent Black total residents in 1930 or were adjacent to those neighborhoods (see Figure 10). Further, two prominent cultural landmarks, the Eighth Regiment Armory and the Savory Ballroom, were located in areas where almost 80 percent residents were classified as Black. The general profiles of the neighborhoods where these sites of mass spectatorship were located reveal insight into the kinds of place-making that occurred through basketball. In particular, venues for mass spectatorship became the primary places where competition sometimes took place across racial category and across gender category. Given Chicago’s entrenched spatial segregation that segmented populations along the categories of race, ethnicity, and class, these kinds of competitions would have carried the material and symbolic weight of athleticism as an intersection of racialized gender and ability. The spatial location and spatial uses of these venues helps elucidate the role basketball competition played in urban communities organized by race and class distinction.
Figure 10: Mass Spectatorship Venues and Percentage of Black Residents per 1930 Census Tract
The evidence that men’s and women’s games were played in these kinds of spaces demonstrates that basketball, and sports more generally, was interwoven into the cultural landscape and fabric of the city. The distinction between the arts and sports had not yet been fully inculcated in the newly emergent leisure public. This fact draws our attention to the imbrication of physical culture in the twentieth century’s larger cultural milieu. For example, the Recreation Survey reported, “in recognizing the competition of basketball as an attraction, motion picture theaters have staged the experiment of short basketball games between amateur teams as an additional ‘feature’.”46 While these activities were quite different in nature, they often occurred in the same spaces. This proximity and even adjacency becomes more apparent through spatial analyses and highlights the relationship between material and symbolic economies of movement, meaning, and power.

In smaller venues, women exclusively played other women and almost exclusively games were racially segregated but larger venues were sites of mass leisure and competition across sex and race became a way to draw interest from audiences. Often times, women’s teams played opening games to provide entertainment before headline events, often men’s professional or semi-professional matches. With two and sometimes three games, promoters could extend the evening, as well as the bets wagered on winners and losers. When it came to mass spectatorship, novelty was as on par with skill in terms of selling tickets. The Chicago Recreation Survey summarized, “in recent years the teams which have enjoyed the most outstanding success have been those which have barnstormed the country competing with local teams. Usually the freak element has assisted the box office”.47 And, the Chicago Defender wrote in 1936, “basketball with all its thrills and excitement will be presented on a scale as never before in Chicago with White City at 63rd and South Parkway chosen for a series of great attractions. Professional
amateur and ‘freak’ teams will be paraded around before South Side fans in the form of triple header calls, recruiting the greatest talent from all over the United States”.48

Many of the basketball teams who played in large venues had built reputations on special and sensationalized statuses. The Harlem Globetrotters used comedy and hi-jinks. One team, called the Roller Bear Flashes played in roller skates. An all-Black men’s team called the Zulu Cannibal Giants, played games “attired in grass skirts and war paint” faced the Chicago Majors on January 2nd, 1937.49 And, the Oklahoma All-American Indians, “composed entirely of real full-blooded Indians” also played a Black team called the Collegians in 1937. According to the Chicago Defender, “Before the game the Indians come onto the floor attired in their native costume for introduction, stage a ceremonial dance and smoke the pipes of peace with members of the opposing team. The Indians are in great demands throughout the country and their appearance here is a break for Chicago basketball followers.”50 These early examples of sensational competition reveal a public spectacle orchestrated through the novelty of embodied of sex and race difference articulated through athletic ability. These forms of competition were also inherently tied to hierarchies which were at once reiterated and destabilized through basketball. One 1939 White City triple header advertised games between House of David and the Harlem Globetrotters, Asian American Hong Was Kues of San Francisco against Loyola University freshmen men, and the “Spencer Coals, former champions under men's rules, will play the Co-Ads[sic].”51 This event thus featured three competitions across racial classification with women’s and men’s games side by side.

Women’s teams often played against men’s teams and these matches were popular viewing affairs. For example, the Babe Didrikson Five met the Duffy Florals, a premier men’s team, at White City in 1933 while on a longer barnstorming tour. Reporting on the game, the
Chicago Tribune noted that she “intends to prove to her Chicago admirers that she is the equal of men starts at basketball.” A few years earlier, in 1931, the Taylor Trunks met the House of David team again at White City in an opening match before a game between the Chicago Bruins and the Fort Wayne Hoosiers. And in 1932, the Taylor Trunks faced the First Americans, a “team composed of Indians.” Other Black teams like the Club Store Co-Eds, the Savoy Colts and the Oberlin Girls played white women’s teams, often during AAU play or from the church scene or the JPI girls. An article on the Oberlin Girls game against the Baby Ruth Girls, a team sponsored by a Candy Company describes, “The Baby Ruths basketball team, composed of mostly white girls, defeated the Oberlin girls, whose regulars are largely Race players.” This description is significant as it highlights the difference between teams being representative of certain communities and the actual demographic profile of the team’s players. The teams themselves take on community identities, sometimes beyond that of players themselves. Interestingly, I found no accounts of Black women’s teams playing men, but the Savoy Colt’s did field a mixed team with at least one man on it when they went on the road out of state. This was found to be “rather novel indeed.”

The most popular and prolific Chicago team was the Taylor Trunks. According to local news writer Harland Rohm, by 1930 the team had already won 194 games and only lost nine over the course of eight years averaging almost 28 points a game and the team won three consecutive Central AAU titles in 1924, 1925, and 1926 as well as national championships in the 1927-1928 and 1928-1929 seasons. As the Trunks became more popular and successful, they attracted stand out players from throughout the Chicagoland area and their players ranged in age and occupation. The team included working women, some who worked as stenographers and playground administrators, as well as high school girls. The Trunks played women’s teams
from Chicago and other cities using women’s and men’s rules. They also played charity and exhibition matches against popular men’s teams. They were known for a style of play that emphasized quick dribbles and forward push to the basket. They travelled all around the city to play their games. Over the years, their destinations included the Broadway Armory, Loyola Gymnasium, White City, Chicago Stadium, and the Park Casino. The Broadway Armory was a familiar site for their victories. Many of the games played at the Broadway Armory were openers for the professional Chicago Bruins matches. With two and sometimes three games, promoters could extend the evening as well as the bets wagered on winners and losers.

Figure 11: Taylor Trunks Team Picture

![Taylor Trunks Team Picture](image)


The Trunks had become “so good that it has taken to picking on boys’ church teams and such outfits as the bewhiskered troupe from the House of David.” On January 7th, 1931, the Taylor Trunks played the House of David men’s team at the Broadway Armory in front of a 3,400 person crowd. The Trunks won the game 18 to 9. The previous year, the teams had split
victories across a four game series. They had played each other in other venues, like the Chicago Stadium and White City. The House of David team was comprised of men mostly from a religious commune called the Israelite House of David in Michigan. The commune prohibited sex, meat, alcohol, tobacco and personal property. However, the commune maintained a zoo and amusement park in West Michigan called Eden Springs Park. Apparently, the House of David started fielding baseball teams as a “distraction from celibacy.”

They went on to field semi-pro men’s baseball and basketball barnstorming teams. The House of David teams travelled to generate revenue and to spread the gospel for their religious colony. The cult forbade cutting the hair so the team gained attention for playing in long beards and braids. In another game between the teams, a promotional video reported that “the ‘boys’ win by a hair.” The use of boys’ in quotes signals an overt gendered jab against the House of David team whose hair was much longer than the mostly bobbed Taylor Trunks.

In another match on January 20, 1928, an audience of 4,000 people witnessed an evening “with all the thrills of a three-ring circus” saw the Taylor Trunks play the J.P.I 105 pound boys while the Chicago Bruins beat Cleveland. The Trunks, so used to winning, “varied the monotony of victories over teams of their own sex by accepting a 26 to 11 defeat.” The early battle of the sexes tenor to these matches reveals the gender difference played a role in sensationalizing the public spectacle. Dominant teams like the Taylor Trunks also had to look outside the city for significant competition. These pursuits also generated novel interest and regional pride to support the team’s victory over “invaders.” The Trunks played the Edmonton Commercial Grads women's team at least 5 times over the latter half of the 1920’s. These matches took place in Chicago and Edmonton. One of the biggest women’s games at the Broadway Armory was a “girls’ championship of the basketball world” between the Taylor Trunks (called the Tri-
Chi’s in the news) and the Edmonton Commercial Grads, the world famous women’s team from Canada that had gone undefeated over four years. Reporting on the game, Don Maxwell wrote, “Ten bob haired girls checked their powder puffs and maidenly manners in the dressing rooms of the Broadway armory last night, galloped out on the basketball floor and for forty minutes fought the rip roaringest battle 6,000 fans ever saw” and the crowd responded in kind, “all the time the folks in the bleachers are screaming and cheering. It is a bedlam of noise…” With the article titled “Girls War Like Amazons on Basket Floor”, Maxwell further hyperbolized the scene, stating “Folks who went to the game expecting to see a ladylike struggle fainted in the first quarter. If any of those girls gets peeved at her husband, the odds are 10 to 1 he’ll wake up in a hospital.” The outlandish description provided by Maxwell demonstrates the tendency to sensationalize these kinds of events and the way they were parlayed into broader spheres of gendered life, including marriage.

Similarly, the freak label applied to teams that exhibited intentional racialized or primitive tropes demonstrates an urban cultural imagination that was titillated by the “Other” and called on imperial legacies of conquest. In their essay on “sporting otherness” and imperial populist gaze within US national pastimes, Andrews, Bustad and Celvenger write “exoticized, and often eroticized, representations, practices and embodiments of non-white racial Otherness, or alterity, were routinely mobilized as markers of racial/ethnic difference that re-inscribed and legitimated the position of authority - and physical, intellectual, cultural and moral supremacy - of white culture and bodies.” At baseline, basketball positioned bodies on view without much cover from the audience gaze as arms and legs and skin moved in whirls. Bodies on view, with accoutrements like shiny satin fabric, long flowing hair, or even grass skirts, brought faraway places closer in the mind’s eye. These freak teams found a temporary home in Chicago’s large
venues as people came out to not only see competitive games but also cultural exhibitions. While high profile white women’s teams were not considered freaks themselves, their battle of the sex like contests were freak events in that they disrupted the idea of sex segregated competition and sometimes took place across racial categories. These events would have been charged with the larger cultural undertones that policed the social boundaries of racial and gendered sociality. At the same time, competition allowed for controlled occasions wherein these boundaries were destabilized.

**Armories, Nightclubs, and Contiguous Zones**

The Broadway Armory and Eighth Regiment Armory were primarily created to serve military purposes, which at a local, national and even global scale worked to protect a racial and gendered order built on patriarchy and white supremacy. Yet, these spaces cannot be reduced to these aims. In both armories, attendees could experience public spectacles and performances of racialized gender staged through basketball competition. Competition across sex categories and across racial categories generated a lot of commercial interest. These kinds of events promised the lure of racialized sexuality and gender in the public sphere. Access to public space was not shared equally as many of these spaces were intended for male viewers and white patrons enjoyed more freedom of movement. While teams of color competed against white teams and women played against men in the bracketed social space of the basketball court, their fans still had to navigate the white supremacist public sphere. Yet, the occupation of these spaces and the availability of such events Chicago can be seen as a temporary reorganization of the spatial politics of exclusion that dominated much of early twentieth century Chicago urban life. Armories, even as they functioned a pedagogical function for the consolidation of exclusion, also became spaces for occasions of embodied and affective dissent.
The Broadway Armory was located on 5917 N Broadway in the north side Edgewood neighborhood. It was reputed to have the “largest wooden floor space without obstruction in the country.” This space included six basketball courts as well as additional tennis and other indoor sports courts. The building was behemoth 82,800 square feet (see Figure 12). Its total capacity reached 15,000 with a seating capacity of 8,000. From 1920 onward through the 1930s it was the site of many annual Central AAU tournaments, Chicago Bruins’ American Basketball and Middle States League games, the Central States’ Girls Cage League. In addition to basketball games, the Broadway Armory was a location for high profile boxing, wrestling and tennis matches, track and field meets, bicycle races, as well as political rallies and even a flower show exhibition. The Broadway Armory was by far the most popular scene of high profile women’s games. The city’s most prolific women’s team, the Taylor Trunks, played there often against both men’s and women’s teams.

**Figure 12: Exterior View of the Broadway Armory**

According to the Park District, it was designed to be the “Winter Garden Ice Skating Rink” in 1916. But, by World War I, the building was re-appropriated as an armory. The site was converted to an armory in 1920 and originally served as a National Guard 202 division Coast Anti-Aircraft Artillery armory. The building was a state owned facility but was rented out to groups. The 202nd regiment was established as a reserve military force to provide support to the state of Illinois while most of the active military had been deployed during World War I. At its opening dedication ceremony Illinois’ Governor Lowden praised the reserve militia’s activity during and after World War I stating:

it was fortunate indeed for the people of this city and of this commonwealth that they did exhibit this spirit of unselfishness because not long afterward the race riots arose in this city. These regiments and among them this one were called into service and responded instantly. From the moment they took charge of affairs peace was restore and quiet resigned.

The Broadway Armory was allocated to support the training and activity of the Illinois National Guard on the heels of Chicago’s own Red Summer race riots that exploded on a hot July 27th day at the beach in 1919. The discord had bubbled up as race relations deteriorated in post-World War I unemployment and veteran resentment. Ethnic white gangs, organized as social and athletic clubs, were terrorizing Black communities without punishment. Long existing racial tensions were further exacerbated after the war ended. They came to a head on a segregated beach when a white man assaulted Black swimmers by throwing rocks. One boy died from injuries. The assailant was not arrested. When Black witnesses protested this, they were attacked. Violence echoed through the city as mostly white gangs attacked Black neighborhoods, business, work sites, and public hang outs. More than 1,000 Black families were burned out of their
homes. Governor Lowden authorized over 5,000 militiamen to enforce order. They came from regiments throughout the city.\textsuperscript{83}

Six months after the riots, the Broadway Armory was made the training center for a National Guard regiment as Chicago poised itself for more riots to come. In a sense, the Broadway Armory was established to train the keepers of racial order within public space, which generally equated to discrimination and spatial segregation. The armory thus became a headquarter space to train national guard regiments that could securitize public space, and thus public order during a time of almost certain impending class and race war.

Yet, at the same time the Broadway Armory became one of the most popular venues for high profile men’s and women’s basketball games. Another Chicago Defender summary of a game between the Chicago Bruins and the New York Renaissance a week before lamented, “500 odd fans who came from the South side to back their brothers in color found hardly carfare left to get home. Then, added to this misery, was the fact that the ‘man in the box office’ saw fit to sell tickets in sections D and E to these folks, while the other sections were sold to only whites.” That almost 12 mile trek from South to North side, by today’s standards, takes almost an hour by bus and train and 45 minutes by car. Spectators travelled to support their team but were faced with discrimination upon arrival even as interracial competition was encouraged by the armory.

The \textit{Chicago Defender} reported on a men’s game between the Chicago Bruins and the Savoy Big 5 that took place at the White City amusement park, writing “a small crowd saw the play. The estimated attendance was 1,300. Many stayed away because of the way they were handled at the Broadway Armory, where a distinct line was drawn between fans of different hue”.\textsuperscript{84} White City thus had somewhat of a better reputation than the Broadway Armory. This
was perhaps due to its proximity to the South Side. Yet, White City was no haven.\textsuperscript{85} The White City amusement park was de facto segregated.\textsuperscript{86}

Much like the Broadway Armory, White City was a site for novelty exhibitions and competition that tilted on the fulcrum of social categories of race and gender. Access to these venues also tilted on the fulcrum of race and gender based exclusions but programming mobilized these distinctions to attract customers and audiences. These competitions were charged with the symbolic weight of race relations within society at large. In this context, the armory created an environment where different groups were brought together under controlled circumstances. But while integrated competition was staged, integrated spectatorship was by no means assured. While interracial competition provided an entertaining playbill for large audiences, spectatorship was still segregated and spectators’ access to venues was racially policed in predominantly white areas. At the same time, competition across racial lines took on a different tenor in Chicago’s Black Metropolis.

The Eighth Regiment Armory was a cultural centerpiece of the Black Metropolis community. The Eighth Regiment of the Illinois National Guard, affiliated with the 370th Infantry, was the first all-Black military regiment in the United States. The regiment, nicknamed the “Fighting Devils” fought to defend the Texan border during the Mexican Revolution, as well as in Cuba during the Spanish American War and in France during World War I.\textsuperscript{87,88} In 1914, The Eighth Regiment Armory was built at a cost of over 250,000 dollars to support the regiment’s training and activities. The Chicago Defender proudly noted, “No city in America has an entire regiment made up of and officered by men of the race, and consequently no state has had occasion to build and armory.”\textsuperscript{89} At the time of its construction, its facilities were extensive and signaled the armories place within a larger civilian community. They were to include:
every known convenience to perfect the soldiers in the ways of modern warfare and physical training. It will be the delight of the athlete, the swimming pool and gymnasium being along the improved plan…other features will be the rifle range, main drill, banquet hall, two reception halls, ladies’ and gentlemen’s reception rooms, smoking parlor, dining room, kitchen, ladies’ and gentlemen’s coatroom, sanitary barber shop, bowling alley and a room for the “war correspondent”.90

With a seating capacity of 5,000 in over 5,000 square feet, the armory became a popular venue for basketball (see Figure 13). There was no gymnasium, but games were played on the drill floor. It became the flagship venue for both Black men’s and women’s teams.

**Figure 13: Exterior View of the Eighth Regiment Armory**

![Exterior View of the Eighth Regiment Armory](image)

*Chicago Daily News, 1915. Chicago History Museum DN-0064686*

Like the Broadway Armory, this armory supported various cultural activities beyond basketball. These included sold out fashion shows91, a business exhibition92, galas,93 a beauty pageant94, minstrel shows95, boxing matches, a dance-a-thon96, and an interracial indoor tennis
tournament. Benefit dances were popular, one sponsored by the South Central District was headlined by “internationally famous celebrities Duke Ellington Earl Hines, Ada Brown, Jesse Owens” and it raised money to support “much of the vital relief work done by the district.” Political events also took place at the Eighth Regiment Armory. On one occasion, it hosted a “monster mass meeting of protest and action against segregation and bombing on the south side…it is expected that more than 5,000 Chicagoans will assemble and learn what the Protective Circle of Chicago is doing to put a stop to the outrages.” This bevy of events functioned to cement the armory’s cultural prominence and recruit more men into the regiment. The Chicago Defender reiterated, “Every religious, fraternal civil political social patriotic charitable athletic or other organization should be represented in the 8th regiment, and we ask each of these organizations to send us as many recruits from their organizations as possible. Send them in at once.”

Somewhat different to than the Broadway Armory, music and dance performances occurred alongside basketball games as part of an entire night’s activities. For example, when the Forty Club played Evanston at the armory, the news reported that the night included “dancing after the game till 2 a.m. The famous Elgar Dreamland Jazz Orchestra will furnish the music.” On another night when the Eighth Regiment men’s team played, it was advertised as a full night of events: “Meyers’ Jazz Hounds, unquestionably one of the best jazz orchestras of its kind on the South Side, will be with us again. Their music alone is worth twice the price of admission…Two fast games, wonderful music, good dancing, First game at 9 sharp.”

In 1925, The Roamer Girls (see Figure 14), originally based out of Grace Presbyterian Church, played the Harvey Bloomers, a suburban white women’s team, in an opening match alongside a highly touted high school boy’s “national cage title” game between hometown
Wendell Phillips High School and Washington D.C.’s Armstrong Technical High School. The “Winter Classic” sold out as 4,500 fans packed the Eight Regiment Armory and hundreds more, without pre-purchased tickets had to experience it from outside. The evening was the social event of the season with the who’s-who of Black Metropolis in attendance. Days before Defender sports writer, Frank Young, predicted that the night “will stand out as the biggest athletic event of the winter season and perhaps the biggest event indoors this year.” As much was confirmed when afterwards, reporter J. WM. Jesse Lovell recounted, “the game, in point of representative attendance, importance and brilliancy of play, stands at the head of intersectional cage classic and the record crowd sets a new high mark for a Chicago basketball attendance” The night was no small affair:

The program for the evening will consist of two games and a dance. The doors will open at 5:30. The first game between the white girls of Harvey, Ill., and the Roamers, will start at 7:30 sharp. This game must end at 8:40 as at that time both the Phillips and Armstrong teams are to be given use of the floor. The big game starts promptly at 9 o’clock. From 10:30 until 2 in the morning Joe Jordan’s famous Red Hots will dish out jazz music to dance. The management has promised plenty of wax for the floor and have promised to have no fancy dances. The school orchestra will furnish the music during the game.

Another account proclaimed, “Never before in the history of the city has the armory presented such a scene.” It was not just two basketball games, but highlight of all the culture Black Chicago had to offer to its visitors and its residents.

The Roamer Girls were both highly successful and popular throughout Chicago, they “were black women’s national basketball champions throughout the 1920s” and “in a 1927 poll
by the *Defender*, readers picked Virginia Willis as one of the city’s most popular athletes.**108 They became the decisive victors winning a lopsided game over the Harvey Bloomers; the final score was 29 to 3.**109 The Roamer’s star player, and off season national tennis champion, Isadore Channels “proceeded to run wild, scoring 9 baskets, and completely bewildered the visiting white girls from Harvey who seemed bothered with stage fright having never played before such a large crowd.”**110 To win such a game so convincingly in front of the home crowd must have carried significant symbolic weight of achievement and racial pride. These reports on this important evening of activities demonstrate that basketball was woven into the community building as well as efforts to demonstrate that the richness and excellence of a group of people, both biologically and culturally in the face of racial hierarchies.

**Figure 14: Roamer Girls Team Picture**

```
“Win Girls’ Basketball Tournament”, Chicago Defender, March 1, 1930
```
The Broadway Armory and the Eighth Regiment Armory, and other commercial venues, created an environment where attendees could experience public spectacles of race and gender performance staged in and through basketball competition. Competition across sex categories and across racial categories generated a lot of public and commercial interest. In this sense basketball games offered the lure of racialized sexuality, sex, and gender articulated through the somewhat controllable rules of the game. As evidenced in the news accounts and recreational surveys, so called freak teams, often fared best with mass audiences. Added to this, teams without the freak label also garnered additional interest and esteem when they played outside their assigned race and sex category. The biggest games for white women’s teams were often those played against men’s teams or against highly reputed teams from outside such as the Edmonton Grads and the Cleveland Aces. While Black women’s teams also played high profile visitors, I found no instances where local teams played against men. However, there was at least one account of a mixed gender Black travelling team sponsored by the Savoy Ballroom. These crossings and competitions took on the symbolic weight of race and gender relations in larger society. At the same time, basketball temporarily reorganized which forms of bodily presence were encouraged and discouraged in particular spaces. This reading of the Broadway and Eighth Regiment armories and their role in materializing women’s basketball culture elucidates the transnational scope of police and military power that influenced who experienced ease of movement and how. From their beginnings as military buildings to support the National Guard and Army, these armories were erected to support those charged with the securitization of territory and peoples. Even as this was the basis for their development, they came to host a variety of cultural activities. And since they were some of the largest buildings in the city, tens of thousands of people visited them each year.
In his exploration of cultural history of urban sex districts in Progressive Era Chicago, Kevin Mumford highlights the epistemological and ontological production of racialized sexuality in city life and vice culture. Emphasizing the keyword ‘interzone’, Mumford examines how urban spaces and their provocations for sexualized mixing and crossing of the color line were made so in part through migrations and mobilities. Urban dance clubs, neighborhoods and other spaces became interzones that fostered opportunities for interracial sociality. Focusing on a similar time period, Fiona Ngô’s *Imperial Blues* engages the cultural history of New York City jazz scenes and the imperial imaginaries at play within them during a similar time period. She argues that “without a new consideration of how empire circulated in everyday life to inform and transform national subjects...we cannot comprehend the complexities of how race and sexuality in the United States were lived in the interwar years.” Ngô builds on Mary Louise Pratt’s idea of the “contact zone”, which refers “to social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they lived out in many parts of the world today.” For Ngô, jazz cultures are also contact zones with manifold meanings of contact due to “jazz’s sensual and kinetic energies, and the discursive and performative productions of these energies.” Ngô’s focus on jazz publics as well as her attention to the imperial geographies that undergird processes of racialization within them demonstrates that there are “mutable meanings attached to stories about space.” Both Mumford and Ngô critically consider the relationship between urban space, racialization, and culture. Relatedly, Ngô and Mumford also both emphasize the importance of movement and mobility, especially crossings in and through spatial practice, in their analyses. Related to, yet different from Mumford’s notion of the interzone, Ngô argues that jazz, as a contact zone, becomes inflected by imperial spatialities of movement and mobility. She
writes, “movement constitutes a source of both intense power and acute anxiety for the imperial management of race and space. Such movement is multidimensional or multidirectional – not just shifting resources and bodies for war or labor, but actually placing and replacing categories related to sex, race, civilization, and even humanity.”\textsuperscript{116} This is also salient for the study of basketball publics which lie at the intersection of literal physical mobility (often upward) and social mobility, harnessed by the meanings associated with athletic fitness that unfold in spatial imaginaries as well as built environments.

Building on these authors’ observations, I consider the way basketball functioned as a kind of interzone and contact zone in Chicago. Mumford’s use of the term interzone focuses on the dynamics of gender, sex, and interracial cultural spaces. In this way, he brings questions of how bodily and spatial practice interface with regimes of racialized gender and sexuality. Ngo’s exploration of jazz as a contact zone emphasizes that it is “subject to medical, hygienic, and regulatory gazes, is also a zone of ontological indeterminacy.”\textsuperscript{117} In her reading, imperial imaginaries granted an indeterminacy where supposedly national subjects relied on orientalist schemes in creating jazz cultures. Both accounts created a tension between ontological determinacy and indeterminacy. Sports in the way they grapple with biology and culture, especially in the realm of athletic ability, are a great place to also think this tension as well. Like jazz and sex, basketball also shares a performative, kinetic energy focalized around bodies on display. Bringing the interzone and the contact zone together, I argue that women’s basketball culture grounded in location forms a contiguous zone.

In international law, a contiguous zone refers to a 12 nautical mile band of waters extending beyond the territorial waters of a nation-state. Territorial waters come under full sovereignty and governance of a nation-state but in contiguous zones, nation states are afforded
limited control to prevent or punish “infringement of its customs, fiscal, immigration or sanitary laws and regulations within its territory or territorial sea.”¹¹⁸ In this sense, a contiguous zone is located at both the limits and the beginning of control. It is tenuous, and like the water within it comes in and out of range. Relatedly, a contiguous zone is that area where governance over territories, territories of land and body, come into view. It is a zone where sovereign controls over immigration, sanitation, capital, and presence begin and end. To think about women’s basketball and the spaces used for women’s basketball as a contiguous zone is to account for the direct contact, touching and physicality inherent to team sports and to recognize the role that physicality plays in epistemology and ontologies of race and gender. Further, this historical geography of women’s basketball in Chicago points to the way that places are assigned for certain activities extend beyond their intended uses as representational and material economies transpose upon one another unevenly. These spaces thus also psychically and materially exist at the beginnings and ends of regimes of control. Contiguity this offers a means to consider the way basketball venues offer a heterotopian valence that presupposes “a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable.”¹¹⁹ Contiguity, not to be confused with continuity, references a form of touching or contact that requires differentiation so as to recognize one from another. At the same time, in psychology, the law contiguity references “the principle that “actions, sensations, and states of feeling, occurring together, or in close succession, tend to grow together, or cohere, in such a way that when any of them is afterwards presented to the mind, the others are apt to be brought up in ideas”.¹²⁰ Contiguity, in relation, to women’s basketball helps us see the way spaces can be associated with experiences over and beyond their intended uses.

Mumford and Ngo engage sex districts, bars, dance and music clubs and the politics of
consumption that emerged in them as well as the imaginaries and actors that travelled through them. I extend their perspectives in my turn toward venues designated for basketball contests. In fact, the types of ballrooms and dancehalls Mumford and Ngo detail were not dissimilar from the ones that serve as higher profile basketball sites in Chicago. Relatedly, I argue that smaller scale community venues, those mostly interested in mass participation, while they may be explicitly associated with respectability in contrast to vice, are still fashioned in relation to political violence of criminalization, segregation, and conquest linked to imperial anxieties and desires over racialized sex and sexuality that were expressed in and through social divisions of urban space. Venues of mass spectatorship were places charged with both the maintenance and the dissolution of racial and gendered boundaries. And in this way, they form contiguous zones, located at the vacillation of between capture and release. Chicago’s armories and commercial entertainment venues have divergent histories but both kinds became important landmarks in the history of women’s basketball. These sites were charged with the valence of racialized capital that cut up urban spaces to both divide populations and bring them together. Armories were erected to support the activities of the National Guard and state security apparatus. Amidst reverberations of class war and race war in United States, armories served to secure the interests of both state and capital power by mobilizing militias to keep order. Entertainment venues emerged to serve working people seeking leisure and pleasure away from work. These venues were places of public commerce, oftentimes vulnerable to vice associated with public music, dance and performance. Interestingly, basketball was played in both kinds of venues.

Basketball’s symbolic and spatial relations were constituted by the geopolitics of US empire and racial capitalism. Imperial imagery and symbolism were embedded in the cultural vocabulary used to describe teams and players as “freaks”, but these relations were not only
ideological or imagined. This historical geography demonstrates that they were also embedded in
the built environment of the city. Relatedly, access to public space was not shared equally as
many of these sports publics were intended for male viewers. Further, venues in predominantly
white neighborhoods discriminated against Black spectators even when they welcomed Black
teams. While teams of color competed against white teams on the bracketed social space of the
basketball court, fans had to engage the white supremacist public sphere. Competition across sex
categories and across racial categories generated a lot of public and commercial interest. In this
sense, these kinds of events offered the alluring performance of racialized sexuality and gender
in a competitive setting not unlinked from hierarchies of race and sex in broader public life. But
by virtue of this, basketball competition offered the limited opportunity to unsettle these
hierarchies in a somewhat contained manner.

Spectator access to these kinds of competitions were also organized by larger socio-
spatial processes like segregation which served to police ease of movement as well as racialized
sexuality and gender on some bodies but not others. People groups were biopolitically divided in
the city and while basketball offered the means to bring people together in social and spatial
proximity, these biopolitical divisions were not so easily neutralized in public culture. At the
same time, basketball offered the opportunity for heterotopian spatial investments, entangled but
not reducible to the needs of a social hegemony built on racial and sexual hierarchy. Though
these opportunities were fleeting and could not necessarily reconstitute the spatial hegemony of
racism and sexism, they nevertheless reveal the open circuit through which hierarchical orders
are disrupted and reconsolidated. This vacillation between hegemonic capture and excess paired
with the groundedness of physical location and physical touch is precisely what I wish to signal
in the term contiguous zone. Thinking about women’s athletic ability rooted in place as a
contiguous zone provides new insight into the organization of race, class, and gender difference within public and commercial recreation during a period of tremendous economic and social upheaval.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has taken up space in three important and related ways. First, it has begun to map the constellation of popular locations for women’s and men’s basketball and in doing so, has made the argument that where events happened is equally important to the teams and events themselves. This analysis of venues helps make visible how the process of place-making that occurred through women’s basketball, and in particular how this process entailed the use of athletic competition in struggles over rightful claims to public space. Further, competitions that occurred across categories of race and class are especially palpable for thinking about how the stages for contests over the meaning of racialized gender took place through performances of athletic ability. Secondly, this analysis also spatializes the body, which is not just an actor in the scene but also a topos for imaginaries built around ethnic and gendered signifiers that can be seen in the popularity of “freak teams” that drew on primitive, cosmopolitan and exotic tropes as well as the novelty of competition across categories of race and gender. Drawing on the example of two armories, I charted these dynamics to further to explore what it means to call women’s basketball a contiguous zone. Relatedly, I have argued that state sanctioned violence is contiguous to the leisure and spectatorship of basketball, not its opposite. Contiguity here implies that the two touch each other, not only in symbolic imaginaries but in the built environment and across physical bodies. Building on scholarship about racialized gender and sexuality in urban cultural publics, I have framed women’s basketball as a “contiguous zone” to highlight the way women’s games were not a supplementary adjunct to the more important
men’s games, but rather women’s athletic performances of race and gender directly influenced struggles over hierarchically organized in Chicago urban publics. As a contiguous zone, women’s basketball was heterotopian in nature; it was grounded in particular locations that created opportunities for both the disruption and resolution of dominant spatial and social orders.
Notes


3 Kathleen S. Yep, Outside the Paint: When Basketball Ruled at the Chinese Playground (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2009); For example, in Outside the Paint, a book length study on men’s and women’s teams in San Francisco’s Chinatown during 1930s and 1940s, Kathleen Yep explores how basketball was interwoven with Chinese American community building by uncovering a “cultural history” to document how “individuals carve out space for themselves within the context of poverty, patriarchy and racial segregation”. As an ethnographic historian, Yep relies mainly on newspaper records and oral history interviews to reconstruct player and team biographies. While Yep’s exploration of urban community formation is rich, the project does not focus on the way that space also carves out possibilities.

4 John Bale, Sports Geography (London: Routledge. 2003); John F. Rooney, A Geography of American Sport: From Cabin Creek to Anaheim (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1974); Lisa M. DeChano and Fred M. Shelley The Geography-Sports Connection: Using Sports to Teach Geography (Jacksonville, AL: National Council for Geographic Education, 2006); Steven A. Riess, City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Natalie Koch, Critical Geographies of Sport: Space, Power and Sport in Global Perspective (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017). Bale’s work is the most prominent example while John Rooney’s A Geography of American Sport helped found the field of sports geography. Riess’ City Games provides an interesting historical account of US sports geography, while Koch’s edited volume brings together contemporary studies focused on global political economy, nationalisms, and transnational cultural relations. DeChano and Shelley’s The Geography-Sports Connection develops some of the pedagogical merits of sports as a way to engage geographic study more generally.


7 John A. Agnew, Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society (South Wales, Allen & Unwin, 1987).


10 Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”, 7.


16 For more on neighborhood segregation, see: Glen E. Holt and Dominic A. Pacyga. Chicago, a Historical Guide to the Neighborhoods: The Loop and South Side (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1979).

17 Drake and Cayton, Black Metropolis, 12.

18 For more on vice culture in Chicago see: Karen Abbott, Sin in the Second City: Madams, Ministers, Playboys, and the Battle for America’s Soul (New York: Random House, 2007).


21 Gerald R. Gems, Windy City Wars, 23-25.

22 Louis Wirth, Margaret Furez, and Edward Burchard, Local Community Fact Book, 1938 (Chicago: Chicago Recreation Committee, 1939). These community areas often encompassed multiple neighborhoods and have remained consistent over the twentieth century with little changes to existing area boundaries and only two additional areas added. While Chicago is also divided by political wards, these wards are regularly redrawn to reflect population shifts. In distinction, community areas serve no immediate political or economic purpose within city politics. Instead, they reflect sociologically inscribed distinctions that were more relevant to urban organization in the 1920s and 1930s. Nevertheless, since the community areas have remained relatively unchanged, they offer the ability to represent changes over time in the same place.


26 Todd, Byron, and Vierow, *Public Recreation*, xii.


28 I chose to focus on these two sources instead of a broader selection of newspapers that would have included the Herald Examiner, Evening American, Daily News, Chicago Whip, Chicago Bee and other neighborhood papers. To limit my search, I used the Pro Quest Historical Newspapers database for both Chicago Tribune and Chicago Defender articles. I searched only between the years 1920 and 1939 using the search term “girls OR women’s AND basketball OR basket ball”. I surveyed over 1500 articles Doing so yielded about 50 relevant articles from the Chicago Defender and about 70 from the Chicago Tribune. From there, I made additional searches using venue names with the initial terms and then again with prominent team names.

29 I retrieved 1930 census demography and census tract geometry from the NHGIS project maintained by the Minnesota Population Center. Specifically, Relevant census variables include age, race, sex, employment, income, home tenure, and citizenship status. I retrieved contemporary street line geometry from the City of Chicago’s GIS Data Portal.


31 Ibid, 4.

32 Ibid, 6.

33 Gems, *Windy City Wars*, 175.

34 The first Chicago settlement, Hull House, was founded in 1889. By the 1900s, settlement houses dotted the city landscape.

35 Todd, Byron, and Vierow, *Private Recreation*, 13-21. By 1937, of the 31 settlements within the Chicago Federation of Settlements, 23 had gymnasiums and all of these offered gymnasium time to women in addition to men (16). In addition to the Chicago Settlement Federation, 28 other settlements and community agencies offered social services to their members. Twelve of the 17 surveyed had gymnasiums (21). The settlement movement peaked at the end of the Progressive Era, but even through the 1930s, some houses still fielded women’s teams. For example, Emerson House served mostly Italian and Polish people, Olivet Institute served Italian, Hungarian German and Scandinavian people, and the Jewish Peoples’ Institute, formerly the Chicago Hebrew Institute, served Polish people and the Russian Jewish community. All three fielded women’s teams (13). Notably, the Jewish Peoples’ Institute sponsored a very successful women’s team. According to historian Robert Pruter, the JPI Girls were one of a handful of top teams in the city and one of an even fewer number who played interracial games from time to time (38).

36 Todd, Byron, and Vierow, *Private Recreation*, 61-64.; “Basket-Ball,” *The Chicago Defender* (Chicago, IL.) Nov. 28, 1931; “Spencer Coals Win from Blue Island Girls, 24-10,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Apr. 9, 1933; Betty Eckersall, “Girls’ Basketball Teams to Clash in City Tournament,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Mar. 22, 1931. According to Todd, Byron, and Vierow, by 1938 the YMCA had a total of 29 gymnasiums and all but four were used by both men and women (64). The Irving Park YMCA hosted games. For example, The Wabash YMCA was a major site within Chicago’s Black community and sponsored the Church Basketball League. The Division Street YMCA hosted Central AAU tournament games in 1927. The South Chicago YMCA hosted a women's tournament in 1933. According to the Recreation Survey, the YMCAs served different nationalities. Irving Park
YMCA served mostly “American” people, Wabash Avenue served mostly Black people, and Division Street served Polish community, and South Chicago served a variety, Polish, German Yugoslav, Swedish, Italian, and Irish (61). There were only four YWCAs within city limits; the Central, West Side, South Side, and South Parkway Branches (64). Only one, the South Side branch was mentioned in local news, but nearby Evanston’s Emerson St. YWCA Wizards played other Chicago teams. Notably, the Central YWCA did help sponsor a citywide tournament for amateur girls over 17 years old in 1931.

37 Todd, Byron, and Vierow, Private Recreation, 39. Of 1577 churches registered by the recreation survey, 228 had gymnasiums and at least 170 of these gymnasiums had dimensions suitable for playing basketball.

38 Todd, Byron, and Vierow, Private Recreation, 71-14; “K. Of C. Basket League To Play 16 Games Today,” Chicago Daily Tribune (Chicago, IL), Nov 22, 1925; “K. Of C. Girls Win,” Chicago Daily Tribune (Chicago, IL), Dec. 20, 1927; “Chicago Basketball League Starts 2d Round Tonight,” Chicago Daily Tribune (Chicago, IL), Nov. 20, 1928. Of the 170 gymnasiums, there were a total of 41 basketball courts, all of which likely became sites of CYO and KC basketball play. The Knights of Columbus maintained 14 clubhouses throughout the city which also provided venues for organized basketball. In 1925, the Knights of Columbus Basketball League took place in venues throughout the city. In 1927 and 1928, the West Side clubhouse was host to both the Midwest League and Chicago Basketball League women’s games. By the time of the survey's publication, the Knights of Columbus had been superseded by the CYO in youth sports but still provided financial and logistical support to CYO efforts. The Knights of Columbus and CYO also rented larger public facilities to meet the demands of their large programs.

39 Todd, Byron, and Vierow, Private Recreation, 69.

40 Todd, Byron, and Vierow, Private Recreation, 71.

41 “200 Basketball Teams to Clash In C. Y. O. Today,” Chicago Daily Tribune (Chicago, IL), Dec 17, 1933.

42 “98 Games to Open C.Y.O. League Today,” Chicago Daily Tribune (Chicago, IL), Dec 10, 1933.

43 Todd, Byron, and Vierow, Private Recreation, 71.

44 For one example see: Anne Meis Kupner, The Chicago Black Renaissance and Women's Activism (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

45 Todd, Byron, and Vierow, Public Recreation, 235-236.; Todd, Byron, and Vierow Commercial Recreation, 138-139. By the late 1930s, there were 9 established armories within city limits. All of these except two, were owned and built by the State of Illinois. The Recreation Survey reported “while the primary function of armories is not recreational, nevertheless these agencies actually have equipment which can be definitely regarded as recreational facilities”. These armories had a bevy of recreation and athletic facilities and events in addition to military activities. The total seating capacity of these armories varied from 500 to 13,000. Most of them also regularly rented their facilities to private organizations and groups for basketball among other activities. At least three of the city’s 11 regularly operating ballrooms, the Park Casino, White City, and the Savoy Ballroom, housed men’s and women’s basketball events. Often games were scheduled on days when the ballrooms were not in operation. Mondays and Tuesdays were popular days for games while Sundays were reserved for dancing activities in all ballrooms in the city.


47 Todd, Byron, and Vierow, Commercial Recreation, 69.

48 “Basket-Ball,” The Chicago Defender (Chicago, IL), Dec. 5, 1936.

49 “Zulu Giants Invade City for Battle at White City,” The Chicago Defender (Chicago, IL), Jan. 2, 1937.

“3 Basketball Games Carded in White City,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Nov. 26, 1939.


“Bruins Meet Ft. Wayne at White City Tonight,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL); Feb. 8, 1931.

“Taylor Trunks To Play Indian Quintet Tonight,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Jan. 28, 1932.


“North Side Beats South Side for Title,” *The Chicago Defender* (Chicago, IL), Mar. 17, 1934.

“Rather Novel Indeed,” *The Chicago Defender,* (Chicago, IL), May 20, 1933.

Harland Rohm, “194 Games Won and 9 Lost; That’s Trunks’ 8 Year Record,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Dec. 7, 1929. They first formed in 1920 under the name Lake View Community Girls and based themselves out of the Lake View Community House. In the early years, players hailed from the Lake View Neighborhood. By 1924, the Tri Chi’s were approached T.J. Taylor, a Chicago based entrepreneur and luggage maker for sponsorship. They took the name Taylor Trunk Tri-Chis but later dropped the Tri-Chis in favor of a shortened Taylor Trunks and began to play in sateen uniforms with “Taylor Trunks” across the front.

“Tri-Chi Girls' Basket Team Plays Canadians Tonight,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Apr. 29, 1927.


Wilfrid Smith, “Bruins Fade In 2d Half; Lose to Brooklyn, 31-20,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Jan 8, 1931.


This video was posted to an online forum by a member via youtube link. The link was taken down due to copyright violation. However, cross referencing this footage with newspaper accounts, it is likely this film was shot at the Boardway Armory on January 9, 1930.

“Bruins Dazzle 4,000 By 37-32 Cage Victory: Defeat Cleveland In Furious Battle,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Jan. 20, 1928.

“Cleveland Five Defeats Tri-Chi Girls By 17 To 15: Invaders Retain World's Basket Title,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Feb. 20, 1927.

“Tri-Chi Girls' Basket Team Plays Canadians Tonight,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Apr. 29, 1927.

Don Maxwell, “Girls War Like Amazons on Basket Floor: Canadians Defeat Tri-Chis, 19 to 17,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Apr. 6, 1926.

Don Maxwell, “Girls War Like Amazons,” Apr. 6, 1926.
70 Don Maxwell, “Girls War Like Amazons,” Apr. 6, 1926.


72 Todd, Byron, and Vierow, *Public Recreation*, 238-239.


74 “Mylenberg Defeats Quinn in City Tennis,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Feb. 14, 1935.

75 “City Preps Hold Prelim Events of Track Games” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Mar 6, 1924.


78 “Hiram To Open Fight For State In Rallies Here: Speaks Tonight at Two Meetings,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Jan. 18, 1924.


85 “Triple-Header Basket Cards for White City,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago: IL), Nov 29, 1936. Located on 63rd and South Park Ave in the Woodlawn community area, White City opened in 1905 and closed all but its skating rink, in 1933 in part due to the oncoming Depression. The park was still rented out as a venue after it closed. Throughout its tenure, White City became a site for football, baseball, boxing and wrestling matches. In later years, starting around 1936, White City was increasingly utilized as a venue for basketball events including league and tournament games as well as exhibition series.

86 “Men in Statue, Babies in Courage,” *Chicago Defender* (Chicago, IL), Jul. 27, 1912; Mrs. M. Craig Halsey, “Now White City,” *The Chicago Defender* (Chicago, IL), Aug. 3, 1929. The park garnered a poor reputation for being a literal white city. Though it was not official, White City discouraged Black customers from attending the park and went to lengths to limit their full use of it. In addition, entertainment in the park was also racialized and degraded Black staff for the enjoyment of white patrons. A woman identified as Mrs. M. Craig Halsey wrote to the *Chicago Defender* in 1929, lamenting that, “White City is using ugly discrimination in regard to the free rides. They exchange their tickets for free rides at the gates, but give a certain kind to the whites and do not let our children use the free tickets they give to them when they get in. In some places where they spend their pennies they drive them out. When they get ready to go home they are made to remain until a certain time, when they want to let them all out.
at once”. Chicago neighborhood demographics shifted throughout the early 1900s, in part due to the Great Migration from Southern states. The surrounding Woodlawn neighborhood demographic shifted as more Black residents settled in and segregationist policies became less viable as economic downturn set in. Still, the White City skating rink, that remained open through the 1940s and continued to uphold an unofficial anti-black segregation that Black civil rights groups protested and eventually sued the venue on those grounds.

87 Raymond Watkins, “Famous Old Eighth Regiment of Chicago Has Had Romantic History,” The Chicago Defender (Chicago, IL), Sep. 1, 1934.


91 “4,000 View Fashion Show,” The Chicago Defender (Chicago, IL), Mar. 8, 1924.

92 Nahum Brascher, “75,000 View Exhibits At $100,000 Exposition of Race Businessmen,” Chicago Defender (Chicago, IL), Apr. 9, 1938.

93 “Sport Dance of Auxiliary Gala Affair: Courtesy is Climax to Governor's Day,” The Chicago Defender (Chicago, IL), Aug. 20, 1932.

94 “Golden Brown Ball Attracts Elite of City,” The Chicago Defender (Chicago, IL), Jun. 20, 1925.

95 “Thousands Jam Armory to See 1924 Minstrels,” The Chicago Defender (Chicago, IL), Apr. 26, 1924.

96 “Marathon Dance Moves in Truck; Near 400th Hr.,” Chicago Daily Tribune (Chicago, IL), Jul. 17, 1928.

97 “Indoor Tennis Championships Here March 23,” The Chicago Defender (Chicago, IL), Mar. 2, 1935.


102 “Eighth Regiment Five to Play Crack Team on Feb. 5,” The Chicago Defender (Chicago, IL), Feb. 3, 1923.

103 Jesse Lovell, “Phillips Takes Basketball Game From Armstrong By 25-15 Score Before 4,500,” The Chicago Defender (Chicago, IL), Feb 21, 1925.

104 “FAY Says” The Chicago Defender (Chicago, IL), Jan 17, 1925.

105 Jesse Lovell, “Phillips Takes Basketball Game from Armstrong By 25-15 Score Before 4,500,” The Chicago Defender (Chicago, IL), Feb 21, 1925.

106 “FAY SAYS,” The Chicago Defender (Chicago, IL), Jan 17, 1925.


Jesse Lovell, “Phillips Takes Basketball Game from Armstrong By 25-15 Score Before 4,500,” The Chicago Defender (Chicago, IL), Feb 21, 1925.


Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), 34.

Ngô, Imperial Blues, 26.

Ngô, Imperial Blues, 14.

Ngô, Imperial Blues, 24.

Ngô, Imperial Blues, 27.


Chapter 5: Conclusion

Summary of Chapters

The preceding chapters laid out the way early twentieth-century women’s basketball became a site of struggle around the overrepresentation and the overdetermination of racialized gender. I have paid special attention to the types of value that basketball was implicitly or explicitly argued to hold for the women who played and the larger communities of which they were members. The game was not standardized. Instead, it meant many different things to many different people. As a form of popular physical culture, women’s basketball pervaded US society. It was perhaps the most popular and most accessible team sport for women during the early twentieth century and continues to be so in the early twenty first century. I have called it a technology because people used basketball to accomplish biopolitical goals like securing or untethering distinctions between type of humans, types of human activity, and types of human environments. These distinctions became legible through shared meanings around the concept of athletic ability.

While women’s basketball was invented to serve a particular biopolitical goal, because it mobilized desire and pleasure, it was not reducible to this goal. Interestingly, basketball taken up by different constituencies as a force for the achievement of quite oppositional goals. It offered white assimilation or ethnic insulation. It turned women into primitive Amazons or cultivated civilized modern women. It created worker docility or generated new types of work altogether. It proved or disproved racial or gender superiority on the basis of athletic achievement. Basketball was seen as an avenue for upward social mobility, middle class respectability, and self-investment - or alternatively, as an avenue for dysfunction, insubordination, and embodied defiance. Yet, the game could not be entirely limited to its apparent utilitarian ends. It was an
overdetermined nexus for the articulation and contestation of social difference. Whatever intentions behind the cultural and political forces that shaped women’s basketball were, they could not fully predict, capture, or reign in the affective, embodied, or subjective surpluses created along the way. After all, momentum has a tendency to get away from itself.

In tracing out the distinct, and sometimes overlapping trajectories, that have influenced and proliferated this game, I have tried to foreground questions about the biopolitics of racialized gender and athletic ability. For example, chapter two investigated how physical educator pedagogy promoted women’s basketball as a disciplinary technology of racialized gender that could be applied toward the goal of civilizational progress, racial and national guardianship, and liberal self-discipline. Senda Berenson, Dorothy Bocker, and their interlocutors justified a game that could help a narrow group of middle- and upper- class white women properly manage their newfound freedoms. They argued physical educator governance of athletic ability could hinge white women’s self determination to racial and national population control. In this way, these physical educators fostered women’s basketball in an attempt to secure and automate the Color Line in a moment of political instability. Amidst the nominal expansion of U.S. citizenship rights, they claimed basketball could provide tacit discipline through physical training.

In contrast to chapter two, chapter three took up precisely the problem that physical educators feared, the commercialization of women’s basketball. As much as physical education pedagogues, industrial employers and barnstorming outfits laid the infrastructure for the game’s popularization and notoriety. While widespread, women’s work as basketball players has been left out of both the US history of industrial women workers and the history of professional sports. Industrial era women’s basketball first emerged through employer sponsored recreation as a supplement to goods producing work but later it became its own kind of affective, service
based, and often entrepreneurial or contract work. In particular, commercialization was buoyed by the emergence of consumptive leisure economies that encouraged cultural performances of racialized gender as paid affective labor. This generated avenues for more working and middle-class women to play, often after high school and before marriage. While very few women were able to take advantage of these opportunities, basketball did grant these women privileges and cultural capital, like extra income, travel, and popular notoriety. Athletic ability gathered together physical skill, strength, and stamina but also sex appeal, sociability, and other kinds of affective work. This case study of women’s basketball in the industrial setting exposes the way gender difference is sedimented through class position and through specific kinds of labor.

The fourth chapter enacted a grounded spatial inquiry into the way these developments shaped urban public culture in Chicago. Through archival spatial analysis, I made visible how the process of place-making occurred through women’s basketball. It explored how communities invested in the game with interests in both mass participation and mass spectatorship. Fittingly, the sites for these two different styles varied. I show how the process of place-making in physical culture entailed contests over the meaning of racialized gender that took place through performances of athletic ability. People groups told their histories of struggle and also played out socio-spatial struggles in real time through basketball. Uncovering this history takes us on a journey to a motley range of venues. Chicago’s playing environment emerged out of the uneven spatial hierarchies of gendered publics, poverty, racial and ethnic segregation. At the same time, this playing environment created opportunities for the contestation of these dynamics in and through the cultural activity of basketball.

In answering the two primary research questions, this project makes four contributions to existing scholarship; two are historical and the other two are theoretical. First, I add to the
existing work in women’s basketball history and contributes to the recovery of the little-known history of a game that was in fact no small feature of the US socio-cultural landscape. While there is rich scholarship on the women’s history of basketball, no book length study has engaged the historical phenomenon of early twentieth century basketball as an explicitly biopolitical project. By taking precisely this task on, I have revealed dynamic cultural phenomena fully embedded in twentieth century education, labor relations and urban publics. By focusing on the relationships between people, events, and environments, I add the dimension of historical geography to the largely biographical accounts of this era. Together these histories demarcate the relationship between athletic ability and racialized gender.

Secondly, this exploration of early twentieth-century women’s basketball intervenes in US historiographies of embodied sex and gendered labor. More generally, popular chronologies of this era tend to periodize stark differences between liberalism and neoliberalism as well as the difference between industrialism and post-industrialism. Although nuanced scholarship more acutely addresses these tendencies, popular and generalizing claims sometimes oversimplify a more complicated picture of life in the early twentieth-century United States. Firstly, we have generally inherited the idea that in the liberal industrial era embodied sex was seen as more biologically stable in distinction to the contemporary changeability of sex and gender, most notably, but not exclusively, evidenced in the increasing acceptance of transgender as a proper gender category. Similarly, we have inherited the idea that industrial gendered labor involved only material and goods-based production and that flexible, affective labor is largely a product of the post-industrial US economy. My study of women’s basketball encounters some of these overgeneralizations and demonstrates how they do not align with the historical record.

This project also makes two important theoretical interventions. This first arises within
the field of sports studies. I show how sports studies has yet to fully contend with the way that ability structures many claims about the progressive value of sports, particularly women’s sports. By focalizing on the woman athlete as a biopolitical body, I make the logic of ability that informs the value of sports more apparent as a political limitation. In doing so, I reveal some synergistic connections between sports studies and disability studies. Sports studies has become an insightful place to see the cultural work that sports accomplish with regard to political hegemony and resistance. Foucauldian sports studies has made apparent the way athletic bodies function as sites of productive power, productive of domination and also liberation. Yet, sports studies can benefit from the existent critical theorizing of able-bodiedness that has occurred in disability studies. While disability studies theorists have largely engaged the critique of able-embodiment through the axis of disability, here I investigate the constructedness of ability, making clear the way it is articulated through and within racializing and gendering processes.

Through this research I have tried to highlight the way that questions that seem like they are only about gendered ability are deeply entrenched in racialized personhood. I’ve also tried to highlight how racialized performances of athletic ability, are also deeply embedded in the biopolitics of gender. Secondly, this work contributes to feminist theories of intersectionality by articulating how ableism indexes biopolitical regimes that organize racialized gender. Here, this indexing function both extends and departs from traditional accounts of intersectional regimes of power and identity. Further, I demonstrated how ability doesn’t function as a discrete category. Rather, ability functions as an index of the biopolitics of racialized gender. I believe this theoretical investigation is necessary for anticipating the discourses of ability that will come to govern the biopolitics of gender and sex ever more through improvement and optimization in the twenty first century.
**Coda: Contemporary Connections**

This dissertation was influenced by many years of playing and following different sports as well as observing the way sports have become more and more legitimate as proper political objects in the New Left in recent years. I think it is safe to say that nowadays, it is not as hard to explain why sports matter for social justice. One need only look at recent news headlines about national anthem protests in solidarity with the contemporary Black freedom movement, labor strikes and lawsuits calling attention to problem of capitalist exploitation by amateur organizations and billionaire team owners alike, consumer boycotts of sporting events to oppose discriminatory legislation like Arizona’s SB 1070 or North Carolina’s HB 2. For good reason, sports have become cultural mega-spectacles that both influence and are influenced by the political struggles that define our contemporary world-historical moment.

While this project traces the early history of women’s basketball, it does so with an eye on present day circumstances, not only the present global state women’s basketball, but also, tangentially, the present state of other biopolitical technologies that bring together issues of ability and racialized gender. Transhumanism is popularly defined as, “the belief or theory that the human race can evolve beyond its current physical and mental limitations, especially by means of science and technology.” The popularization of personalized medicine, synthetic hormone therapies, robotic assistants, bio-hacking, biometric surveillance, genetic screening, and new reproductive technologies all interface with transhumanism in some way. Each of these developments endeavors to prevent poor outcomes and improve futures. Biotechnologies are reshaping the bodyscape of gender in the twenty first century. Efforts to resist aging, eradicate disability, enhance beauty as well as cognitive or physical performance, are all becoming more palpable in the contemporary United States. These efforts intersect with the politics of ability and
racialized gender under contemporary neoliberal capitalism. These biopolitical technologies and their growing popularity demonstrate how enticing and insidious the idea of progress can be when it claims universal access but places the power to wield, own, and reproduce this technology in the hands of the few. Given the contradiction between biopolitical technologies that proclaim to liberate some from the unavoidable fact of disease and death and the very fact that these projects often re-enact caesuras of life wherein deaths of many is not registered as an ethical indignation.

I think it is important to situate these biotechnological developments that inflect early twenty-first century articulations of ability with great caution. Transhumanist biotechnologies hinge on ableism, and Rey Chow’s concept “technologized idealism” fittingly describes some of the undergirding fascist politics that push transhumanisms forward. Chow argues that technologized idealism defines fascism even though as it remains fascism’s “most significant but often neglected aspect.” Her definition emphasizes the synergy of a progressive idealism and a technological apparatus that enables the “search for an idealized self-image through a heartfelt surrender to something higher and more beautiful.” In this light, fascism, as technologized idealism, actually seems to be a useful analytical frame from which to understand the structure of ableism that circulates in the construction of bodily ability which hinges not only on dysgenic understanding of disability but also the investment in eugenic ideals. Calling it a “banal term”, Rey Chow notes that fascism is popularly used to “condemn attitudes or behaviors that we consider to be excessively autocratic or domineering.” Chow highlights that, as a banal critical term, fascism has popularly functioned by virtue of negation. The cry of fascism is used to distance oneself from a relatively universally accepted form of evil like say Hitler, or Mussolini, or even Trump.
In order to more fully understand the range of what we consider to be fascist, I build on two key claims Chow makes about fascism. The first is that it should not be exclusively or even primarily understood as a state ideology. The second is that it should not be exclusively or primarily understood in its negative valence. While fascist politics often seek to delimit the power of capital and privacy in order to facilitate a submission of the self to a greater collective good, they still emerge from the same ideological and structural vectors that undergird liberal capitalism: self-possession and self-determination. As Robert Paxton argues, “in order to give birth to fascism, a society must have known political liberty - for better or for worse.” Fascism, in its tendency toward totalizing submission to a greater more progressive ideal, is not a threat to liberal humanism’s central tenet of self-determination and self-possession. It is instead the technology that awaits to be mobilized when the hegemonic gatekeeping of these tenets is thrown into crisis by processes like migration, economic upheaval, and political revolution. In this sense, fascism, and the violence it produces, functions as the logical conclusion of Western Enlightenment thought tattered by the burgeoning crises of modernity and the logic of ability is deeply embedded in it. In this way, fascism becomes the crisis valence of biopolitical management intended to resecure what Campbell called the “modernist craving for ontological security” and what Wynter understands as the “overrepresentation of Man”. Fascism seeks to perfectly align what could happen with what will happen, to eliminate all forms of non-productive surplus in the areas of power and feeling, and to automate a biopolitical mandate.

Fascism shares a root in idea of fascination. To be fascinated is to be inspired, to be awed, to have a sense of wonderment. A state of fascination implies a positive captivation or to be affected beyond rationale. Volumes have been published on the violence of fascism. Far less has actually been written fascism’s more positive valences, specifically that of hope and
idealism, or what Foucault once called “the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us.” It is much easier to see the violence of fascism, oriented to the disavowal of forms of life and death dealing than it is to see a truly eugenic iteration, the form that fosters the interpolation of valued forms of life, and by extension, ability, as recursive and tautological. Instead of hoisting fascism as a term to denote one’s opposition to an obvious evil, Chow considers the positive longings inspired by fascist orientations to the values of the good and the ideal. These oft neglected positive values get refracted through fascist technologies and their incumbent ideologies of progress as much as their more brutal and terrorizing corollaries. Similarly, Chow references Susan Sontag who notes that fascism is generally thought to stand for brutality, and terror, but in fact it “also stands for an ideal or rather ideals that are persistent today under the other banners: the ideal of life as art, the cult of beauty, the fetishism of courage, the dissolution of alienation in ecstatic feelings of community; the repudiation of the intellect; the family of man (under the parenthood of leaders).”

These qualities are often amplified in sporting cultures and form part of the reasoning with which we argue for their cultural value. Advancements in the imbrication of biotechnology and sports, more generally, have resulted in the demystification of exceptional forms of athletic embodiment but have also produced new indices of enhancement that further intensify the interrelationship of bodies and technologies. Technologized idealism becomes particularly pronounced in the triangulation of social value, vitality, and able-bodiedness. The imbrication of sports and biotechnology comprises some of the frontier through which this kind of idealism finds expression. And yet, while fascism aspires toward totality and toward the transparency of ability upon social value, there always remains a difference between knowledge of the body and
embodied knowledge. By further opening access to embodied knowledge, sports can offer avenues for disavowal and disruption. In order to tap into these possibilities, we have to look to the past to make sense of the future. By looking back, we gain humility and gather tools to recalibrate visions of justice that more effectively contest logics of white supremacist heteropatriarchal capitalist empire that flow through the biopolitics of ability.
Notes


ii Chow, *Ethic After Idealism*, 16.


Bibliography


Berenson, Senda. “Basketball for Women” Physical Education 3 (September 1896), 1-5.


Pronger, Brian. *Body Fascism: Salvation in the Technology of Physical Fitness*. Toronto; University of Toronto Press, 2002


Seligman, Amanda. “Community Areas.” *Encyclopedia of Chicago*


Stanaland, Peggy “The Early Years of Basketball in Kentucky” in *A Century of Women’s Basketball: From Frailty to the Final Four*, ed. Joan Hult and Marianne Trekell. Reston


