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The greatest Olympian of all-time? The ideological implications of celebrating Michael Phelps

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THE GREATEST OLYMPIAN OF ALL-TIME? THE IDEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CELEBRATING MICHAEL PHELPS

by

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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To my parents: thanks for ignoring my childhood wishes to learn karate and signing me up for swim team instead, and for always encouraging me to read.

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ABSTRACT

On August 4, 2012, white American swimmer Michael Phelps was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award by the international swimming federation in recognition of his Olympic achievements. The unprecedented award – a specially commissioned sculpture – proclaimed Phelps as "the greatest Olympian of All Time." This title may, at one level, be perceived as a benign honorific bestowed upon an extra-ordinary athlete. On another level, the title should be viewed as a result of the hidden ideological work done by and through discourses of swimming in America, discourses that are always racialized, classed, nationalized, and gendered.

Michael Phelps is the point of entry to unpack how modern sport and the Olympics reproduce these dominant views and processes that lead to contemporary social inequalities. My focus is an examination of the power relations that enabled and produced *him* as the Greatest Olympian of All-Time. Phelps's phenomenal performance in the pool is undeniable, but I argue that the ensuing adulation and recognition results as much from his privileged position as a white American man as from his hard work, skill, and determination. This dissertation unpacks and explains how these processes work in the contemporary sporting world.

Scholars have long argued that sport is a site for understanding how race, class, gender, and nationalisms are performed and/or constructed. In this dissertation, I take a critical cultural studies approach to demonstrate that, from an ideological and cultural point of view, Michael Phelps *is* the greatest Olympian of all time because *he is the physical and symbolic embodiment of the modern Olympic movement,* a movement founded upon 19th century ideals of humanism, liberalism, and modernity

that continues to stabilize and reinforce dominant views of race, gender, class, nationalism and sexuality.

To make this argument, I first historicize the sport of swimming itself. As one of the sports at the first Modern Olympics in 1896, swimming is an ideal site for understanding the modernization process through sport. Swimming has long been dominated by white athletes, and I deploy the recent concept of the sporting racial project to grasp how modernization is a racialized project fundamental to constructions of institutional racism. Next, I examine media representations of Michael Phelps in the early 21st century. These representations reveal the role of sport in popular imaginations of the nation and, specifically, the importance of the white male sporting hero in constructions of America in the post-9/11 world. Then, I explore and contextualize notions and meanings of "amateur" and "eligibility" within late 20th and early 21st century structures of Olympic swimming, including the complex and contradictory relationships between inter/national governing bodies. Finally, I show how these three seemingly independent processes involving race, class, gender, and nation are interdependent and fundamental to modern sport and the Olympics.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Having won 22 total medals, 18 of which are gold, across four Olympic Games, American swimmer Michael Phelps is the most decorated Olympian of All-Time. Such an incredible achievement has led to Phelps being named the "Greatest Olympian of All-Time" in the popular press and by the international swimming governing federation. Although this title is unofficial, it carries significant cultural importance.

My focus is an examination of the power relations that enabled and produced *him* as the Greatest Olympian of All-Time. Phelps's phenomenal performance in the pool is undeniable, but I argue that the ensuing adulation and recognition results as much from his privileged position as a white American man as from his hard work, skill, and determination. This dissertation unpacks and explains how these processes work in the contemporary sporting world.

Scholars have long argued that sport is a site for understanding how race, class, gender, and nationalisms are performed and/or constructed. In this dissertation, I demonstrate that, from an ideological and cultural point of view, Michael Phelps *is* the greatest Olympian of all time because *he is the physical and symbolic embodiment of the modern Olympic movement*. First, I examine how race is constructed through the modern sport of swimming. Then, I examine how media representations of Michael Phelps create a racialized American national identity. Finally, I explore the changing meanings of eligibility in elite international sport in order to demonstrate how a professional athlete can still compete in the Olympics.

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CHAPTER 1: Introducing the Greatest Olympian of All Time

Michael Phelps won his eighteenth gold medal, and twenty-second total Olympic medal (both records) by swimming the butterfly leg of the 400-meter medley relay on August 4, 2012. After the race was over, the other twenty-eight relay finalists lined up to shake his hand. Following his competitors' deferential display, Phelps remained on the pool deck, where he was the honoree in a special ceremony. Dr. Julio C. Maglione, the President of Fédération Internationale de Natation (FINA), the international governing body of the sport of swimming, synchronized swimming, water polo, and diving, presented Michael Phelps with a Lifetime Achievement Award, a polished stainless steel sculpture, called *Brindis*, set atop a white marble base with the inscription "To Michael Phelps, the greatest Olympic athlete of all time, from FINA."

The race itself was on tape-delayed television in the United States, but the unprecedented ceremony was not seen on American television – although several print and electronic news sources reported on it[1]. In spite of the fact that the presentation took place after the swimming events were completed, the Olympics' Aquatics Centre remained teeming with spectators. The ceremony took less than ten minutes, and after Phelps was awarded the trophy by Maglione, he paraded around the Aquatics Centre pool deck to uninterrupted clapping and cheering as his many Olympic highlights played on the Centre's big screen. Bruce Springsteen's "Born in

[1] My description is based on a six-minute video posted on YouTube by Sergio Lopez Miro, a former Spanish Olympian who, in 2012, was the coach of a prominent American swimming club and school team, The Bolles School ("Michael Phelps-Best Olympic Athlete Ceremony," youtube.com/michael-phelps-best-olympic-athlete-ceremony).

the USA" played as Olympians and spectators alike chanted his name and applauded him. If the adulation at the Aquatics Centre was any indication, there was much support for the fact that Phelps was, indeed, the Greatest Olympian of All-Time.

Cultural Implications of "The Greatest Olympian of All-Time"

FINA's official proclamation of Phelps as the "greatest Olympian of all-time" resurrected the popular "debate" as to who is the greatest Olympian – a debate that initially began after Phelps's records-breaking performance in Beijing (Casey, 2008c; Longman, 2008; Price, 2008). The ceremony inspired continuation of the debate in newspaper columns, television segments, and Internet comment boards. Empirically, the title of "most decorated" can be supported. Phelps has won both the most total Olympic medals and the most total gold medals in modern Olympic history, and his eight gold medals in eight events in 2008 is the record for the most gold (and total) medals at one Olympic games. While moderately subjective, the title of "most successful" can be buttressed by his impressive medal tallies across his four Olympics. Yet, the title "greatest Olympian" is difficult to support empirically and has the makings of a quintessential barstool debate along the lines of "who is the best baseball player of all-time" or "who is this year's most valuable player" where terms like "best" and "valuable" get parsed and debated.

Being proclaimed the "Greatest Olympian of All Time" is culturally and symbolically significant, however. Billions of people watch the games on both television and the internet – a reported 3.8 billion people from 220 different nations watched the London Olympics (IOC Marketing Report, 2012), and they rely on an ideal of Olympism based on notions of individual "achievement, sacrifice, endurance,

and sportsmanship" celebrated through stories of Olympic heroes (Birrell, 2008, p. 8) and the "redemptive power of 'pure sport' for athletes, for their spectators, and for local and national communities" (Lenskyj, 2000, p. ix). The Games stand alone in attracting and engaging with casual sporting fans (Billings, 2008), and as Birrell (2008), Carrington (2004), and Andrews (1998) assert, this attraction and engagement is rife with ideological implications. As Tomlinson and Whannel (1984) observed,

> [t]he Olympic Games have produced many household names. But it would be wrong to think that these were just special people, extra-ordinary individuals. People are indissolubly linked to the forces of their time. And it is forces – of the market, of the state – of which they are an embodiment. (p. vi-vii)

The title of "Greatest Olympian of All Time" can certainly reflect athletic achievement; it also directly and indirectly works for and with the broader ideological work being done by the ideals and myths of Olympism. It is not that Phelps' nomination as the "greatest Olympian of all time" is uncontested; it is that that contestation has mostly occurred within the bounds of uncritical debate about medals and in-pool (or on-track) performances, not about the dominant racial, national, gender, and economic or market ideologies surrounding such a title.

The Modern Olympic Movement was "revived"[2] from the Ancient Greek Olympics, and based on 19th century ideals of humanism, liberalism, and modernity, and, as such, a white American man participating in the individual sport of swimming holding this "title" is almost axiomatic; from an ideological and cultural point of

[2] Bruce Kidd (1984) makes a compelling argument that the notion of "reviving" the Modern Games (as Coubertin claimed) is ideologically loaded. He argues that it may be best to consider the games as "re-appropriated" or "recast" by 19th century European elites within specific social and political contexts that valued specific and chosen interpretations of Classicism.

view, Michael Phelps *is* the greatest Olympian of all time because *he is the physical and symbolic embodiment of the modern Olympic movement*, an industry that relies on secular, Euro-American, political ideals and market logics to perpetuate a Eurocentric, white, capitalist, patriarchal, indeed neo/colonial, project that "consolidates many of the dominant views of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality" (Birrell, 2008, p. 22).

But Michael Phelps is not the primary focus of my project; he is merely the starting point. My focus is an examination of the power relations, what Tomlinson & Whannel (1984) call "forces," that enabled and produced *him* as the Greatest Olympian of All-Time. Michael Phelps' phenomenal performance in the pool is undeniable, but I argue that the ensuing adulation and recognition results as much from his privileged position as a white American man as from his hard work, skill, and determination. The title of "Greatest Olympian of All Time" may, at one level, be perceived as a benign honorific bestowed upon an extra-ordinary athlete. On another level, the title can be viewed as a result of the ideological work done by/through discourses of swimming in America, discourses that are always racialized, classed, and gendered. This project traces these discourses and the power relations from which they emerged in order to apprehend how, from perspective of cultural analysis, it only "makes sense" that the greatest Olympian of all-time would be a white man from that nation and that sport.

Who is Michael Phelps? Narrativizing Michael Phelps

Michel Phelps was born in 1985, to Fred and Debbie Phelps. He joined two older sisters, Hilary and Whitney. According to his autobiographies (Phelps &

Abrahamson, 2009; Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2012), the Phelps family pediatrician suggested swimming as a healthy form of exercise for his sisters and as a way to teach them water safety. As the younger brother, Michael was dragged along to practices and meets. He, too, soon learned to swim. Ironically, he reports not liking it at first. But, after overcoming his initial fear of putting his face in the water, he quickly took to the sport.

His parents divorced when Michael was in elementary school and he lived with his mom and two sisters in a "middle-class suburb" of Baltimore (Schaller, 2008, p. 4). Debbie Phelps is often portrayed as a hard-working, dedicated single mother who raised three children. Phelps credits his mother for working her way up from being a teacher to a principal, while still imparting valuable life lessons to her children. Through her own example and by holding her children accountable, she taught Michael and his sisters the value of hard work, dedication, and family (Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009; Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2012).

According to Michael, sports helped teach him similar lessons. From an early age, Michael showed great aquatic promise so he often swam in a training group with kids three to five years older. His swimming, and participation in other sports like baseball and lacrosse, helped curb his high energy level, which was diagnosed as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in the sixth grade. Michael managed his ADHD by taking Ritalin two to three times a day during the week, but he did not have to take the drugs on the weekend as he "burned off" the excess energy by getting shuttled from swim practice to baseball to lacrosse. According to his recollections, the medication was "an unnecessary crutch that I was mentally tough

enough to go without" (Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009, p. 137), and, after deciding not to take the medication during a swim meet – and learning to properly channel and control his emotional outbursts into improving his own sporting performances – he approached his mother and pediatrician and asked to stop taking medication for his ADHD (Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009; Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2012).

Despite his precocious talent – or maybe as a result of it – he claims that he frequently had difficulties with teammates and coaches, and he did not always fit in with the other, often older, swimmers in his training group. However, at the age of eleven, he met Bob Bowman, who would become his only real coach. After some initial clashes, Phelps flourished under the demanding Bowman and one morning Bowman called Michael and his parents to a meeting. At this meeting, Bowman told the Phelpses that Michael had the talent to go to the Olympics, but they had to begin the preparation immediately. His parents supported Bowman's plan without much hesitation. Michael was twelve years old.

His mom was the primary parent, so she took on most of the responsibilities. She contacted the school about adjusting his class schedule around his training needs. At his parents' and Bowman's suggestion, Michael quit both baseball and lacrosse in order to focus on swimming. His training increased to the point where he would often leave his home before dawn and come back after dark, fitting five to six hours of swimming around a full day of school. Although Bowman's plans included going to the Olympic Trials in 2000 as a spectator, qualifying for the 2004 Olympics, and then aiming for peak success at the 2008 Olympics, Michael accelerated the schedule.

By finishing second behind world record holder and eventual gold medalist Tom Malchow in the 200-meter butterfly at the Olympic Trials, Phelps qualified for the Sydney Olympics while still a high school student (Lieber, 2000; Shipley, 2000). At 15 years of age, he was the youngest man to represent the USA in swimming since fourteen-year-old miler Ralph Flanagan in 1932 (Associated Press, 1932). He finished an impressive fifth in his event at Sydney. Australia's Ian Thorpe, who would later become Phelps's rival, dominated the swimming events at his home Olympics, winning a silver medal in the 200-meter freestyle and a gold medal in the 400-meter freestyle while also anchoring Australia's two freestyle relays to surprising victories over the American relays.

In the four years between Sydney and Athens, Phelps surrendered his collegiate eligibility by signing a professional contract. He became a multiple world champion and world record holder, and some prognosticators gave him a chance to match (or beat) Mark Spitz's record for most gold medals at one Olympic games. As part of the build-up to the Athens Games, Phelps' sponsor Speedo offered a $1,000,000 bonus if he matched or beat Spitz.

By any measure, Phelps had an outstanding 2004 Olympics in Athens. He won six gold medals and two bronzes. His only "losses" (bronze medals) occurred in two events in which he was relatively inexperienced: the 400-meter freestyle relay and the 200-meter freestyle, a race many journalists dubbed the "Race of the Century." Phelps was proud of his swim in the 200-meter freestyle, citing it as "maybe the defining moment in my swim career" (Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009, p. 120) where he lost only to Thorpe and the gold-medalist, the Netherlands' Pieter van

Hoogenband. Still, many media outlets branded it as "something of a failure" (Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009, p. 121) because he did not tie or break Spitz's record and, therefore, did not earn the $1,000,000 bonus from Speedo. He left Athens as a six-time gold medalist and planned to move away from his home in Baltimore to Ann Arbor, to follow Bob Bowman to the University of Michigan. But before moving north for good, Phelps had to capitalize on his successes in Greece.

Immediately after returning from Athens, Phelps's management agency, Octagon, in conjunction with Disney and other sponsors, produced a swimming tour where he traveled with fellow Olympians Lenny Krayzelberg and Ian Crocker to swimming pools around the country giving exhibitions and selling merchandise. The goal of the tour was to capitalize on his – and the other Americans' – swimming successes at Athens[3]. They compared the tour to past Olympic figure skating tours and saw it as both a model for future post-Olympic swimmers and as "an advanced event marketing class" for Phelps (Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2009, p. 227).

While on the tour, he began to notice some back pain, which was later diagnosed as a pars fracture[4] and forced him to take some time off away from training. According to Phelps's remembrances, the time away from the structure of the sport and the disciplining eye of Coach Bowman (who was already up in Michigan) lead to him making his first transgression as a public figure. He was

[3] According to Phelps, USA Swimming usually saw a 4% post-Olympic bump in registration, but that number was doubled in the months after Athens due to the Americans' swimming successes in Athens (Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2012).
[4] Phelps describes a pars fracture as a stress fracture in the back.

arrested for a Driving While Impaired[5] after visiting a friend at a college near Baltimore. In *Beneath the Surface* (Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2012), he calls it a "terrible choice" (p. 234) and in *No Limits* (Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009), he refers to it as a "mistake" (p. 141). Publicly, he took full responsibility for his actions, pled guilty to DWI, paid a fine, and did community service which included going to Mothers Against Drug Driving meetings and speaking at schools and youth centers about the dangers of drinking and driving. He moved to Ann Arbor shortly after the sentencing.

Once there, he joined the Bowman-coached University of Michigan and Club Wolverine's elite swimming team, a small group of former and potential Olympians. Phelps and his family describe the years in Ann Arbor as a time of personal growth living away from home – especially after his first public misstep with the DWI arrest (McMullen, 2006; Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009; Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2012). While away from Baltimore and his mom, he began to embrace his role of professional athlete by focusing on becoming a competent spokesperson and endorser for his sponsors and his training.

Phelps's media profile grew in the four years between Athens and Beijing – as did his swimming successes. At the 2007 FINA World Championships in Melbourne, Australia, Phelps broke four individual gold medals while winning five individual events (100-meter and 200-meter butterfly; 200-meter and 400-meter individual medleys; 200-meter freestyle) and two additional relay gold medals. Only a false start by a relay teammate kept him from a probable (and unprecedented) eighth world

[5] In both of his autobiographies, he states that he only had a couple beers. According to Paul McMullen's 2006 biography of Phelps, *Amazing Pace*, a Breathalyzer test determined his Blood Alcohol content as the Maryland legal limit of 0.08; of course, Michael was still under the legal age for drinking at the time.

championship. Once again, Speedo offered Phelps a $1,000,000 bonus if he could beat or tie Mark Spitz's record for most gold medals in one Olympic games, but, by 2008, the achievement was deemed likely enough that Speedo could not find an insurance company to insure their bonus (Rovell, 2008).

Phelps did indeed win eight gold medals in his eight events[6] over the first week of the Olympics. But, it was not just that he won, it was the ways he won that made the feat more salient. Phelps won in world-record breaking, dominating fashion (400-meter IM; 200-meter IM; 200-meter freestyle; 800-meter freestyle relay; 400-meter medley relay); he also won while overcoming adversity (a world-record swim in the 200-meter butterfly was hindered by a goggle malfunction which left him swimming blind and forced him to count his strokes (Hesse, 2008)); and he won by coming from behind – both as an individual (he won the 100-meter butterfly by 0.01 seconds after being in seventh place at the halfway point) and as a member of a team (400-meter relay anchor Jason Lezak out-touched the French anchor by seven-hundredths of a second after entering the water a body-length behind). His impressive performance at Beijing were so noteworthy that his races were shown on video screens at football and baseball stadiums across America – and the Associated Press used a "flash" headline to announce his eighth gold medal, an action that they have traditionally saved for historic events like the assassination of President Kennedy; the moon landing; and September 11th (Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009). For his historic accomplishments, he was named *Sports Illustrated*'s 2008 Sportsman of the Year, becoming the first swimmer to win the honor (Shipnuck, 2008).

[6] Swimming events are segregated by gender, and, in 2008, there were sixteen events for men and sixteen events for women. So, Phelps won gold in a quarter of the total events on the program.

After Beijing, Phelps took some time off from intensive training, and then moved back to Baltimore where he resumed training with Bowman, who had also returned to Baltimore and their former club team, North Baltimore Aquatic Club. The combination of Olympic fame and time away from the pool resulted in another public relations problem for Phelps. Weeks after he was on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* as their 2008 Sportsman of the Year, Phelps found himself on the front page of the British tabloid *News of the World* with what appeared to be a marijuana pipe pressed against his lips. Despite some initial negative public reactions, Phelps was able to navigate this potential pitfall while receiving only a three month suspension from USA Swimming, and only one sponsor dropped him, when cereal maker Kellogg's allowed his contract to expire (Macur, 2009). Although he did not discuss the marijuana in his 2012 autobiography, an editor's note at the beginning of the edition used language similar to that Phelps used regarding his post-Athens DWI, arguing that

> [t]he incident could have been the first of many—a result of his fame getting to his head or too much pressure resting on his shoulders—but he chose not to go down that path…Once again, he proved that he could learn from his mistakes, recover, and continue competing at an even higher level (Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2012, p. viii).

Despite national media's promotion of Ryan Lochte as the new star of American swimming at London 2012, Phelps was once again the most decorated individual Olympian, winning four gold medals and two silvers in his seven events (Brady, 2012b; Crouse, 2012c; Lohn, 2012a; Park, 2012; Shipley, 2012c, 2012d; Zinser, 2012). He also became the first man to win the same swimming individual

event at three consecutive Olympics[7] and broke Soviet gymnast Larisa Latynina's previous record of eighteen total medals (Crouse, 2012d, 2012e; Lohn, 2012c; Lopresti, 2012).

Phelps announced his retirement after London, claiming that he did not want to swim beyond the age of thirty (Brady, 2012d). Although he was out of the pool, Phelps did not stay out of the public eye. During the spring of 2013, he was the subject of a reality television show, the fifth season of the Golf Channel's "Haney Project," where renowned golf coach Hank Haney worked with him to improve his golf game. Phelps also maintained his relationship with many of his sponsors, worked as a commentator for some major swimming meets, became an administrator at the North Baltimore Aquatic Club, worked with his eponymous foundation, and was occasionally photographed in celebrity magazines.

In the winter of 2013, it was reported that he was back in the USADA drug-testing pool and training (Keith, 2013). And, a few months later, he announced a tentative comeback by swimming in a handful of elite swimming meets. He qualified to represent the USA at Pan-Pacific Championships, and won the 100-meter butterfly with the fastest time in the world while also qualifying to swim in three individual races and two or three relay races at the 2015 FINA World Championships in Kazan, Russia. Due to his suspension from the US national team, he swam at the 2015 USA Swimming National Championships in San Antonio, Texas instead of the World

[7] Phelps won both the 100-meter butterfly and the 200-meter individual medley in London. Australia's Dawn Fraser was the first Olympian (man or woman) to achieve this when she won the 100-meter freestyle at the 1964 Olympics after winning it in 1956 and 1960. Hungary's Krisztina Egerszegi won the 200-meter backstroke in 1988, 1992, and 1996.

Championships in Russia[8]. In San Antonio, Phelps won three national championships and his times in the 100-meter butterfly, 200-meter butterfly, and 200-meter individual medley were the fastest in the world. As of the spring of 2016, he is living in Arizona and training with Bowman at Arizona State University in order to qualify for the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, his fifth and – reportedly – final Games.

Why Phelps?

Michael Phelps's career achievements are startlingly exceptional. He has represented the United States at every summer Olympics in the 21st century, and is on pace to do so in 2016 at Rio de Janeiro, barring any unforeseen setbacks. He has won more medals than any other Olympian. He has won more gold medals than any other Olympian at a single Games *and* across his Olympic career. These, as they say, are the facts. Curiously, Michael Phelps has not been the subject of much academic inquiry in our field of sport studies.

Grant Farred (2012) utilized the 2008 edition of Phelps's autobiography *No Limits: The Will to Succeed* to argue that Phelps was emblematic of a specific kind of neoliberalism that merged with conservativism to celebrate individuality in the context of representing the American nation at a time of crisis. Nikolas Dickerson

[8] As a result of a September 30, 2014 arrest for allegedly driving under the influence of alcohol, speeding, and crossing double yellow lines, USA Swimming suspended Phelps for six months (beginning October 6, 2014). Furthermore, "Phelps and USA Swimming each agree that Phelps will not represent the United States at the 2015 FINA World Swimming Championships in Kazan, Russia, from August 2-9." (USA Swimming, "USA Swimming Announces Discipline for Michael Phelps," October 6, 2014). The day before the suspension, Phelps used his personal twitter page (twitter.com/MichaelPhelps) to announce that he'd be entering an unspecified treatment program, writing "I'm going to take some time away to attend a program that will provide the help I need to better understand myself." He attended a treatment facility in Arizona for 45 days and returned to competition in the spring of 2015 (Layden, 2015).

(2012) examined media representations of Phelps's alleged marijuana usage to trace the racialized, gendered, classed, and nationalized discourses of marijuana in popular culture.

David Barney (2010) employed Phelps's Speedo-clad Beijing performance to ground a brief descriptive examination of "the evolution of the fashion of competitive swim attire in the 20th Century as well as the cumulative and then subsequent demise of the so-called super-suits used in the past three Olympiads of this 21st century" (p. 312). Finally, Rod Troester and Lindsay Johns (2013) focus on the same 'public transgression' Dickerson does (the aforementioned photo of Phelps allegedly smoking from a marijuana pipe). However, whereas Dickerson (2012) critically examined the cultural meanings producing and produced by the discourses surrounding the image, Troester and Johns (2013) examined the event as a case study for how a sporting celebrity used "communication strategies…[to] recove[r] his reputation and salvag[e] lucrative commercial endorsements" (p. 72).

Although I find the above works to be helpful in thinking about Phelps, I use Michael Phelps differently. I examine Michael Phelps as the Greatest Olympian of All-Time utilizing the interdisciplinary approaches available from a sport studies-as-critical cultural studies approach, an approach that demands context (see Andrews 2002; Carrington 2008; McDonald & Birrell 1999; Andrews & Jackson 2001a).

In arguing for the critical cultural studies approach to sport studies, Andrews (2002) argues, relying primarily upon Lawrence Grossberg (1992) and Stuart Hall (1986), for the importance of radical contextualization in our analyses. Following this approach is not simply "plugging in" a sporting practice/event/product to a pre-

existing social and historical context. Instead, we need to be cognizant of the struggle between agency and structure and how these affect and are affected by the contexts in which the practice/event/product occurs. Andrews (2002) further contends that "articulation constitutes the conceptual core" (p. 114) of Hall's cultural studies approach. Practices/events/products occur in very specific contexts and meaning(s) can be understood through articulation, which "involves a method reconstructing a cultural practice's conjunctural relations, identity, and effects to produce a contextually specific map of the social formation" (*Ibid.*). These formations are not static and are best understood as constructed, continued relationships over time and space. Therefore, we should use the interdisciplinary cultural studies approach that will enable us to "reconstruct a context within which a sporting practice, product, or institution becomes understandable" (Andrews, 2002, p. 115).

McDonald and Birrell (1999; Birrell & McDonald, 2000) offer one method for studying sporting events/celebrities/practices/products from a critical cultural studies approach, a method they call reading sport critically. My understandings of what sport studies is and how to "do" sport studies is heavily influenced by this methodological approach and it will therefore be the foundational approach of this project.

Reading sport critically requires a scholar to first identify a particular event, practice, celebrity, or product and then "read" it as if it were a text. McDonald and Birrell (1999) use basketball superstar Michael Jordan as an example of such a text. Although there is a real human being named Michael Jordan, he is "not the sole author of the text that is culturally known as Michael Jordan" (McDonald & Birrell,

1999, p. 292). That site or text, which in this dissertation is Michael Phelps as the Greatest Olympian of All-Time, "offers a unique site for understanding specific articulations of power" (Birrell & McDonald, 2000, p. 4). Focusing analysis on one specific sporting event, product, incident, or celebrity is crucial because "power operates differently in different places and times" and the text's particularity allows critical sport scholars to examine how various relations of power work around and through that one instance (*Ibid.*). Andrews (2002) persuasively argues for making the conjunctural moment a primary concern for sport studies work and McDonald and Birrell (1999) give scholars a way to do so[9].

Michael Phelps, the Greatest Olympian of All-Time, did not occur in a cultural vacuum; although he was and is an aquatic force to be reckoned with, he is not an anomaly. Longstanding historical, cultural, political, economic, and social processes gave rise to the asymmetrical and interactional relationships between and among sport, race, colonialism, modernity, capitalism, gender, nationalism, and institutional politics that produced Michael Phelps as the Greatest Olympian of All-Time. Rather than viewing the sobriquet Greatest Olympian of All-Time as self-evidently earned recognition of his athletic supremacy, I argue that he, indeed, is the exact kind of athlete (white man in individual sport from a Western nation) that the Olympics and FINA would award with this title at this time. The ideologies embodied by Michael Phelps reproduce and are produced by processes of race, nation, gender, and political economy working within and through the Olympics and modern sport.

[9] It has become an effective and popular method for studying sport over the last decade and a half (for examples see Walton, 2010; Burdsey, 2007; Schultz, 2005; the edited collection from Birrell & McDonald (2000); or Andrews & Jackson's 16-chapter collection, *Sport Stars* (2001a)).

Chapter two, "Shaping Michael Phelps," focuses on the development and institutionalization of the sport of swimming. Swimming is a "core" sport of the Olympic Movement (Olympic Charter, 2013) and has been a part of every Modern Olympic games since the first swimmers raced in the frigid and tumultuous Aegean Sea in 1896 (Daland, 2009; Dyreson, 1998). In many ways it is a quintessential modern sport, standardized by time, distance, and technique.

In this chapter, I lay the groundwork for how racialized, nationalized, gendered, and classed discourses work through the *sport* of swimming. I examine the role of sport scientists/coaches in the "sporting racial project" (Carrington, 2010) that is American swimming. I will focus on early to mid-twentieth century texts produced by swimming coaches, physical educators, and sports scientists. Early elite practitioners shaped the sport and its meanings, which then trickled out into our everyday understandings of the sport, and are told and retold over time, thus consolidating ideologies of race – as well as those of gender, nationalism, class, and modernity. These texts rationalized and standardized swimming techniques and practices within the racialized (and gendered and colonializing) discourses of modern sport science, thereby co-producing racial and sport ideologies

The sport of swimming is (and has been) grossly overrepresented by White athletes. At various times, scholars and critics have argued that the under-representation of black and non-White swimmers results from reasons such as lack of access to aquatic facilities, racist ideologies, and/or legacies of Jim Crow segregation (Rich & Giles, 2014; Wiltse, 2007, 2014; Wolcott, 2012). Thus far, the role of early swimming experts and elite practitioners has been underexplored as a possible

explanation. This chapter examines the relationships between race, colonizing, and modern sport by focusing on influential early practitioners whose work shaped the sport and continues to effect subsequent coaches and experts.

Sport scholars have long seen the Olympics and/or Olympians as sites for exploring how nationalisms are represented, produced, and/or achieved (e.g., Billings, 2008; Burdsey, 2007; Butterworth, 2007; Carrington, 2004; Dyreson, 1998; Hogan, 2003; Mandell, 1971; Tomlinson & Young, 2006; Walton, 2010). No athlete without a nation can compete at the Olympic games; individual athletes are allowed to compete in the Olympics only if they are selected by their nation, via its recognized National Olympic Committee. As such, the very act of competing in the Olympics reinforces and reproduces the Nation. Chapter Three, "Nationalizing Michael Phelps," explores the kind of American Nation that Michael Phelps is made to represent through media portrayals of him across his four Olympics Games. As a particularly successful and visual (sporting) representative of the American nation, Phelps is a worthwhile entry point for such an investigation.

The American swimming team has been historically successful at the Olympic Games, winning over 500 medals. Media representations of the sport in the American context reinforce the ideologies of meritocracy where any individual can gain success through hard work and its corollary that those individuals who are unsuccessful need to take personal responsibility and learn from those failures. Phelps himself continually reiterates this ideology by citing his hard work, perseverance, focus, and

dedication for his (many) successes and his failure to adhere to those habits and values whenever he has a public misstep, in or out of the pool[10].

At the beginning of the 21st Century, in a post-Cold War and post-9/11 world, these ideologies are particularly important in how the United States re-presents and re-imagines itself through its (sporting) images. United States success in swimming in general, and Phelps's successes in particular, make it ripe for a critical examination of his representation of the American nation. Phelps is articulated as representative of the nation in 21st century America and how the idea of the 21st century American nation is reconstructed through representations of the swimmer.

Representations of Michael Phelps situate him firmly within what Kyle Kusz calls white cultural nationalism (2001; 2007a; 2007b). The processes of white cultural nationalism have a long history in the United States, but they were "reenergized and reformulated" (Kusz, 2007a, p. 79) by the events of 9/11. In similar ways to the discourses of other white sporting heroes in this time[11], discourses about Phelps and the white sporting racial project of swimming "re-articulate white masculinity as the natural representative of America while re-securing a central and normative position

[10] He calls his first DWI and his pot photograph as logical outcomes due to his poor personal choices during those times, that resulted in him letting fame get to his head surrounding himself with other people who might not have wanted the best for him after his success (Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009; Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2012). For Phelps, the DUI in 2014 was also an outcome of personal failure: his inability to deal with personal problems (family and relationship issues). Furthermore, he also takes responsibility for his Olympic "losses" due to either poor preparation and strategy (fifth in the 200 butterfly in 2000) or poor attitude and training (fourth in the 400 IM and second in the 200 butterfly) (Layden, 2015).

[11] Kusz focuses his analysis on media coverage of Pat Tillman (Kusz, 2007a, 2007b, 2014) and Lance Armstrong (Kusz, 2007b). This notion of white cultural nationalism was also constructed through non-sports white masculine heroes, like the FDNY and the NYPD, immediately post-9/11 (McAlister, 2005).

for white masculinity in American culture at a time when its position has been challenged" (Kusz, 2007b, p. 146).

Modern sport is inextricably linked to the processes of capitalism and modes of consumption in contemporary consumer culture (Horne, 2006; Sage, 1990). My fourth chapter, "Commodifying Michael Phelps," explicates the relationship between the Olympic System and capitalism in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In this chapter, I trace the eligibility rules of the national sporting federation (USA Swimming) in relation to the international sporting federation (FINA) to demonstrate how Michael Phelps's career coincides with a shift of the meanings of "eligibility," from the oppositional binary of amateur/professional and towards an ethic of athletes' own self-responsibility and self-governance in terms of drug use and personal conduct.

Michael Phelps has won more medals than any of the other more than 100,000 modern Olympians over the 116 years since the first modern Games in Athens. Since that time, the Olympics have become arguably the most important global sporting event, with a reported 3.8 billion people from over 220 nations around the globe tuning in to watch the most recent Summer Games (IOC Marketing Report, 2012). Phelps's aquatic accomplishments warrant praise from people who care and enjoy watching human achievement (and I count myself among them). FINA's "official" bestowing of the title, Greatest Olympian of All-Time, onto the White Male American Swimmer Michael Phelps has great cultural importance: a critical examination reveals that the modern ideologies of race, gender, nation, and capitalism

that are foundational to modern sport and the modern Olympics are perfectly embodied by Michael Phelps, a white male American (professional) swimmer.

CHAPTER 2: Shaping Michael Phelps: Swimming as a White Sporting Racial Project

Michael Phelps's first Olympics, in Sydney in 2000, were also the first Olympics where an African-American qualified to represent the United States in swimming: 19-year-old Anthony Ervin[12] tied for the gold medal in the 50-meter freestyle and won a silver medal as a member of the 4x100 freestyle relay. Ervin's accomplishments were celebrated as a breakthrough in swimming's diversity and a sign of progress (Watkins, 2011). Four years later, Maritza Correia became the first African-American woman swimmer to qualify for the Olympics. Cullen Jones identifies as African-American and was a relay teammate of Phelps's in the 4x100 freestyle relay at Beijing in 2008 and in London in 2012.

Journalist Karen Crouse (2012b) hails the 2012 United States Olympic swimming team as the most racially diverse team in history and argues this racial diversity is a sign of progress. However, the forty-nine-person team included only three swimmers identified as people of color, making the team over 93% white: a glaring overrepresentation when compared to the U.S. population (75.1% identified as "white alone" in the 2010 U.S. Census). Repeatedly, swimmers Cullen Jones, Lia Neal, and Anthony Ervin are racially marked as "black swimmers" (Crouse, 2012b, p. D4 ; Watkins, 2011), while the whiteness of Michael Phelps, Ryan Lochte, and Natalie

[12]Ervin seldom identifies as "African-American" or "black," stating in a 2012 interview with *Rolling Stone*: "I don't know a thing about what it was like to be part of the black experience. But now [2012] I do. It's like winning a gold and having a bunch of old white people ask you what it's like to be black. That is my black experience" (quoted in Markides, 2012). His website's biography page states that Ervins's "story is especially unique in that his family represents a broad demographic of Jewish, Native American, and African American decent [sic]. He truly embodies the diversity of our modern world" (anthonyervin.com/bio).

Coughlin went unmarked[13]. Despite a long history of black people swimming in America (Dawson, 2006; Pitts, 2007; Wiltse, 2007), such swimmers are underrepresented when it comes to swimming for the United States in international competitions[14]. The few black swimmers who have participated at the most elite levels of American swimming are lauded as racial "pioneers" and indicators of societal progress in regards to race (Crouse, 2012b; Schaller, 2015; Watkins, 2011).

Sport has long been a site for the "racing" of non-whites and for constructing Whiteness through invisibility (Douglas, 2005). As Delia Douglas (2005) argues, invisibility "is key to the deployment of white racial power" (p. 262). The tension between a visible Otherness and an invisible whiteness is particularly salient in our current historical moment, where being "colorblind" is perceived as ideal (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Bouie, 2014; Haney-Lopez, 2014). Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2014) asserts that this sort of colorblindness ignores the racial differences that shape our society[15] and reifies the invisibility of Whiteness.

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[13]It is important to mention that Crouse (2012b) and others (Hall, 2015; Schaller, 2015; Watkins, 2011) represent race solely as a black-white binary. Both Anthony Ervin and Lia Neal have identified as multiracial, while other swimmers with multiracial (but non-Black) identities are collapsed into the racial category of "white" by the media through the absence of any racial descriptors.

[14]The numbers are somewhat unreliable because of low responses (over 55% of participants did not answer questions about ethnicity), but USA Swimming membership data indicates that youth swimming participation levels for non-white swimmers are very low. In 2014, only 1% of USA Swimming's year-round swimmers reported to be African-American or Black; 0.12% reported American Indian or Native Alaskan ethnicity; 5.3% reported Asian ethnicity; 2.9% of the year-round swimmers claimed Hispanic or Latino/a ethnicity; Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders made up 0.1% of the swimmers; 31.2% reported to be White; 0.6% reported as Other; 3.4% claimed Mixed ethnicity on the registration form; and 55.3% did not respond (USA Swimming 2014 Membership Demographics, 2014). USA Swimming hired an outside organization to survey their membership in 2003 for their 25th anniversary; they found that "90% of our membership considers themselves to be White/Caucasian" (USA Swimming General Membership Information, 2003). Also, in their study about drowning disparities based on race, Hastings, Zahran, and Cable (2006) found that "being Black reduces the odds of participating in swimming by approximately 60%" (p. 908). Based on these limited numbers, it is probably safe to infer that formal swimming participation in the United States for non-whites is very low.

[15]Inequalities in education, wealth, access to housing, income, and treatment in public exist along racial lines (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 2).

While the term "colorblind" is important contextually, Ruth Frankenberg (1993) prefers to use the terms "color evasiveness" or "power evasiveness" to engage with the systemic power relations shaping our societal and cultural understandings of race (p. 14). Mary McDonald (2009) concurs with this reframing because it allows scholars to see colorblindness as an "uncritical appeal to sameness [that] posits whites as innocent bystanders to racial relations and…fail[s] to acknowledge institutional inequality and the difference that race makes." (p. 11). Often solely ascribed onto individual bodies, race should be analyzed institutionally because it is "infused throughout every institution as a modern ruse of power masking the very institutional processes that hierarchically organize the multiplicitous, hybrid, and queer status of bodies" (McDonald, 2005, p. 248). The institutional processes that privileges white bodies can be called Whiteness.

Investigating the production of Whiteness in a particular instance reveals how institutional racism and the resulting structural privileges are created (Frankenberg, 1993, 2001; Hughey, 2010; Hytlon, 2009; McDonald, 2005; McDonald & King, 2012). Racism is often about exclusion and the ill treatment of people of color, but it is also about inclusion and the creation of a system of privilege (Frankenberg, 1993; Lipsitz, 1998). Racism is "enacted through whiteness" (McDonald & King, 2012, p. 1026) and "naming 'whiteness' displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of dominance" (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 6).

Similarly, George Lipstiz (1998) argues that Whiteness serves "as the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name [and] never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations" (p.1). It is a system of racial privileging built over time, a possessive

investment whose literal and figurative value accumulates. Sport is one site where Whiteness is built. Ideologically, the media portrayals of elite "black swimmers" – coupled with the a-racial coverage of white swimmers like Phelps – reinforce swimming's Whiteness by representing white as the unspoken racial norm and by erasing white as a race through its omnipresence or ex-nomination. Such simultaneous "marking and cloaking" is an important component of the construction of Whiteness (Frankenberg, 2001, p. 74).

Scholars have examined how swimming spaces are sites for racial exclusion (DeLuca, 2013; Rich & Giles, 2014; Wiltse, 2007; 2014), but no scholar has examined how the sporting practice itself works in the production of race. Although he primarily uses examples from boxing in his book, Ben Carrington (2010) demonstrates that modern sport and racial meanings are co-productive. This chapter examines the modern creation of the sport of swimming, and builds on Carrington (2010), to demonstrate how systems of racial privilege and inequality are built.

I use Carrington's (2010) *sporting racial project* to understand how race is constructed through sporting practices by examining early-twentieth century swimming coaches' books on swimming. Swimming coaches took a prominent role in the construction of the sport, and many of them were prominent practitioners in the field of sports science, with Barney and Barney (2006) noting that "in the first half of the 20th Century three of the leading so-called sports scientists in the country were swimming coaches" (p. 72). I focus on early-twentieth century texts produced by swimming coaches, physical educators, and sports scientists. Such texts rationalized and standardized swimming techniques and practices within the racialized and colonizing

discourses of modern sport science. Early elite practitioners shaped, and continue to shape, swimming and its meanings that inform our everyday understandings of sport and "race" while constructing Whiteness.

Swimming as a Sporting Racial Project

Sport is a complex human practice rooted in "physical activities played by people involving the training, control, and movement of the human body" (Carrington & Andrews, 2013, p. 11). Sport's popularity and ubiquity in the media, along with its rootedness in the human body, makes it a primary site for public displays of bodies and learning bodily practices. The privileges and meanings afforded to and through certain in/active bodies is a part of sport.

Over his Olympic swimming career, different meanings and privileges were accorded to Phelps's own swimming body. He was the future of the sport through depictions of his young, gangly teenage body in 2000. In 2004, he was the budding star whose body was just capturing his swimming potential by harnessing the years of hard work and discipline; in 2008, his was a perfectly tuned swimming body, prepared, with coach Bob Bowman, meticulously over the course of eight years. In 2012, his body was the aging swimming body of an historic great. And, as he makes his comeback, his body failed him through addiction, but he has now regained control through rededicating his body to the hard work and discipline he showed when he was older. While these many meanings were ascribed to his swimming body, Phelps's whiteness was never discussed in any media coverage.

Sport and race are most intimately connected through their overt linkages to the body, thus the prominence of the body in sport makes it an ideal site for exploring

notions of race. As such, Carrington (2010) focuses on the discursive construction of the black sporting body, which was initially "driven by the desperate search [of early 20th century scientists] to find the physiological essence of the sporting black body" which reduced black athleticism to the body (p. 79). Because Whiteness is constructed as opposite of the Other (Carrington, 2010; Frankenberg, 1993; 2001; Hylton, 2009; McDonald & King, 2012), construction of a Black (Sporting) Other co-constructs a White (Sporting) Identity through deployment of rational and scientific knowledge through the body; "the black sporting Other becomes the means through which the white cognitive self is produced" (Carrington, 2010, p. 81).

Carrington (2010) argues that "racial ideology becomes manifest in the body" (p. 70). Furthermore, he examines the relationship between racial ideology and the (sporting) body and argues for using sport to theorize race, contending that "[*s*]*port helps to make race make sense and sport then works to reshape race*" (Carrington 2010, p. 66; emphasis original). In doing so, Carrington (2010) conceptualizes the notion of a *sporting racial project*, building upon Omi and Winant's racial formation theory:

> to consider sport as a particular racial project (that would include the rules of the game, the actions of the players, fans and coaches, the sports media, institutional governing bodies, as well as sports discourse itself) that has effects in changing racial discourse more generally and that therefore reshapes wider social structures. *Sports become productive, and not merely receptive, of racial discourse and this discourse has material effects both within sport and beyond* (p. 66; emphasis mine).

In essence, the sporting body is a site for the re-creation of racial meanings; it is generative of understandings of race, not just a medium for already constructed racial meanings to be conveyed.

A Eurocentric framework that ignores, erases, or marginalizes the racially based genocidal practices of Empire and colonization is the dominant frame through which our history and social sciences are understood (Carrington, 2010; Feagin, 2010). Feagin (2010) contends "the term 'modernity' has functioned as social science shorthand for industrial and technological civilization, for societies shaped by the views that human beings should actively transform physical environments, that market economies are best, and that bureaucratized nation-states are necessary for societal well-being" (p. 7). This white-centric frame is further constructed through historical and social science work dealing with Empire, slavery, and colonization that erases or ignores explicit mention or discussion of white actors in the roles of oppression or exploitation. Scholars use passive voice or vague generalizations to describe historical events, thereby erasing the white perpetrators of violence upon people of color. Such passive voice constructions of the past read like a present-day application of Bonilla-Silva's (2014) "racism without racists" to early and foundational constructions of institutional racism, obfuscating the white racial frame through which many historical actors worked[16].

Extending his point, Feagin (2010) argues that the white racial frame is constructed through both collective forgetting and selective remembering, because "for most historians of the United States and the West, modernization is about industrialization, urbanization, education, and wealth, and not centrally about genocide, slavery, and the unjust enrichment of European colonists and countries" (p. 18). Here Feagin (2010) links the construction of Whiteness and racism to the colonizing practices of the late 19th century.

[16] The swimming experts I analyze later in this chapter do this type of work in their purposeful modernist approach toward swimming.

Carrington (2010) builds on this idea, arguing that cultural practices such as sport were a foundational component of the colonial project where

> the production of white supremacy as a coherent philosophy rests on the belief in the *intellectual, aesthetic and physical* superiority of whites over all others and in so doing centers the body as a crucial site for the production of racialized identities (p. 70; emphasis original).

Many scientists during this era searched for biological differences to explain performance differences (Cobb, 1936; Dyreson, 2008). Through the search for differences, "race" was constructed as natural, embodied, and a location for differentiation. Scientists produced racialized meanings of the body during this time, which led to the rise of eugenics movement that created racial hierarchy through such scientific racism (Carrington, 2010; Miller, 1998) and culminated in Nazism. During these same contexts, sport scientists created meanings of the sporting racialized bodies.

Carrington (2010) succinctly summarizes the relationships between constructions of race and science thusly: "white supremacy became a social fact that was buttressed by the scientific data…and the supporting grand philosophical theories of race, culture and civilization" (p. 67). Whereas 19th century racial scientists utilized racial discourse to explain white supremacy, Patrick Miller (1998) argues that, "by 1900, another scientific racism" appeared where "experts felt compelled to account for the extraordinary achievements of some black athletes" (p. 127). Miller (1998) illustrates this by recounting how black cyclist Major Turner was x-rayed and measured by multiple scientists after his dominance on the velodromes of France.

While the example of Turner demonstrates how scientists tried to explain one athlete's performance through race, other 20th century academics looked for racial differences by examining the bodies of black sporting bodies. Writing in the 1930s, W. Montague Cobb (1936) and Eleanor Metheny (1939) were contemporaries of the swimming practitioners I analyze later in this chapter. Cobb (1936) used measurements of Jesse Owens and other black runners to refute the numerous biological race arguments that claimed standardized racial measurements. Eleanor Metheny (1939), however, took measurements of the few black undergraduate students at her school's campus to determine "differences in bodily proportions between American Negro and white male college students as related to athletic performance" (p. 41). Despite the small sample size of the study, Metheny (1939) determined that "the bodily proportions of the American Negro are such as to give him a slight kinesiological advantage…in certain types of athletic performance. In certain other types, such as distance running, he is somewhat handicapped" (p. 52). While scientists looked to the black body for "proof" of their innate athletic success, white athletic success was already being attributed to intellectual superiority and determination (Carrington, 2010; Dyreson, 2008; Miller, 1998). Scientific knowledge production processes and sporting knowledge production processes overlapped, including constructions of meanings of "race."

Sporting Scientists and Swimming

Many of the leading swimming experts during the first half of the twentieth century were also leading sport scientists (Barney & Barney, 2006). These men were primarily swimming coaches and physical educators who advocated for the teaching of modern techniques of swimming, and in this role participated in the modernization

process of the sport (Adelman, 1981). My analysis centers on how the modernization of swimming as a sport co-produced racial meanings – in this case, Whiteness.

I analyze five books written or co-written by elected members of the International Swimming Hall of Fame between 1922 and 1940: Louis deBrenda Handley's *Swimming and Watermanship* (1922); George Corsan's *Diving and Swimming Book* (1924); Louis deBrenda Handley and W.J. Howcroft's *Crawl-Stroke Swimming* (1926); T.K. Cureton's *How to Teach Swimming and Diving* (1934); and Matt Mann II and Charles Fries's *Swimming* (1940). Each book's primary goal is to teach modern techniques of swimming, making them appropriate objects of analysis for exploring the development of swimming as a sporting racial project.

Louis deBrenda Handley, perhaps best known as the coach for English Channel pioneer-swimmer Gertrude Ederle, was also a two-time gold medalist (in water polo and as a relay swimmer) at the 1904 St. Louis games. He later became a successful swimming, diving, and water polo coach and a journalist, coaching the American women's Olympic teams from 1920-1936. He was elected to the International Swimming Hall of Fame (ISHOF) in 1967 and was named a charter member of the USA Water Polo Hall of Fame in 1976. He wrote numerous books and articles about aquatic sports, and the publisher of *Crawl-Stroke Swimming* introduced him as "the leading authority in International swimming" (1924, p. 3). His co-author of *Crawl-Stroke Swimming*, W.J. Howcroft, was a leading member of the British swimming community, "where he played many parts and [was] a signal success in every role he has undertaken" (*Ibid.*).

George Corsan "did more than any single person to popularize swimming in North America during the first 25 years of this [20th] century" (ISHOF plaque, 1971). He

developed and proselytized the idea of taking a mass-method approach toward teaching swimming, and he worked with the United States military, the YMCA, and the Boy Scouts of America. He won awards for his numerous articles and books on swimming and teaching swimming, and *The Diving and Swimming Book* "holds up as a worthwhile supplemental textbook even today" (*Ibid.*).

A prolific and influential physical educator and respected sport scientist throughout the early and middle 1900s, Dr. Thomas K. (T.K.) Cureton, Jr. was inducted into the International Swimming Hall of Fame in 1980 due to his expertise and influence. He wrote over 1000 articles, books, and monographs, and held professorships at Springfield College and Illinois in the field of physical education. Through this work, Cureton "helped his first love 'swimming' into a new dimension with scientific coaching techniques" (ISHOF plaque, 1980)[17].

Matt Mann II is probably best known as the 13-time national championship winning coach at the University of Michigan from the late 1920s to early 1950s, but he also coached at Harvard, Yale, the University of Oklahoma, several different clubs and high schools across the Midwest and New England, and the USA swimming team at the 1952 Olympics. One of Corsan's "disciples" (Corsan ISHOF plaque, 1971), Mann was one of only two coaches elected to the International Swimming Hall of Fame in the inaugural class of 1965. Mann's co-author, Charles Fries, was a professor and swim parent. In their book's foreword, Edward Kennedy, then Columbia University swimming

[17] One of Cureton's most famous students was James "Doc" Counsilman (Cureton ISHOF plaque, 1980). Counsilman is the celebrated and revered coach at Indiana University whose *The Science of Swimming* (1968) is "THE text beside which all other swim books are judged" (Counsilman ISHOF plaque, 1976; emphasis original).

coach and former editor of NCAA swimming guide, called it a "modern and timely book" that "reflects the personality of a master coach" (1940, p. v).

The books were in the vanguard of the standardization and rationalization of swimming and swimming coaching. The books were published between 1922 and 1940, in the middle of what T.K. Cureton called the "modern era in swimming" when municipal pools were being built all around the country and the sport rose in popularity (Cureton, 1934, p. 119; cf. Wiltse, 2014). All of the authors proclaim the superiority of a modern, scientific-based approach to swimming. Handley is explicit: "[t]o any one who has made comparative study of old and modern methods of swimming the advantages of the latter are self-evident" (1922, p. 19), as is Corsan who introduces his mass-method teaching style, "it is evident that man can make great natatorial progress by scientific study of the art of swimming" (1924, p. ix). Cureton is more implicit in his justification for the necessity of his book because the growing interest in swimming "created a demand for scientific teaching material in this field" (1934, p. ix).

Constructing Swimming as a Sport

Based upon the characteristics laid out by Adelman (1981) and Guttmann (1978), contemporary swimming is a modern sport: it is rationalized spatially and technically; it is bureaucratically organized by a number of organizations from the international to the neighborhood levels; workouts, competitions, and records are measured quantitatively. It is also fundamentally about utilizing human knowledge to overcome our natural world – or as I tell my swimming students: at its most basic, swimming is about not drowning in an efficient manner.

Because swimming is a survival skill, a fitness activity, and a competitive sport, these books reach a variety of audiences. Befitting a man with his qualifications, Cureton's book (1934) is aimed at presenting a collection of approaches and knowledge that any swimming and diving teacher would need in order to be effective. Corsan's (1924) audience is also mostly teachers and coaches, as he is trying to market his mass-method of teaching. Both Cureton (1934) and Corsan (1924) advocate teaching swimming as part of a well-rounded public education, mostly for safety reasons, but they also reference and discuss swimming as a competitive sport – both to exemplify proper applications of technique and as a natural stage in learning to swim.

Handley (1922), Handley and Howcroft (1926), and Mann and Fries (1940) each mention the activity's health benefits of exercise and/or emergency survival. However, because they are more firmly situated in the world of competitive swimming, their books focus on the sporting aspects of it: training for maximum speed. While we should not forget the importance of the practicality of learning to swim, it is how these books discuss it as a sport that is of most interest – and how they fit into the concept of a *racial sporting project*.

Although all of the books – even, to a lesser extent, Handley and Howcroft's *Crawl-Stroke Swimming* (1926) – offer teaching methods and techniques for other strokes, the focal point of my analysis will be the crawl stroke, or what is now most commonly referred to as "freestyle." I focus my analysis on it because not only is freestyle the dominant stroke of the swimming program at meets from the neighborhood to the international level, but it is also often the first stroke taught to new swimmers. While it may appear in explanations of other strokes during this era, the language of the

White colonial project – where natural resources are taken and improved upon via White rational practice – manifests itself in the descriptions of freestyle in the books I analyze.

As of this writing, the Olympic swimming program includes sixteen events each for men and women. Of these thirty-two events, twenty are either entirely freestyle or contain the stroke as one component[18]. Freestyle is codified in four sentences in the 2013-2017 FINA general rules:

> **SW 5.1** Freestyle means that in an event so designated the swimmer may swim any style, except that in individual medley or medley relay events, freestyle means any style other than backstroke, breaststroke or butterfly. **SW 5.2** Some part of the swimmer must touch the wall upon completion of each length and at the finish. **SW 5.3** Some part of the swimmer must break the surface of the water throughout the race, except it shall be permissible for the swimmer to be completely submerged during the turn and for a distance of not more than 15 meters after the start and each turn. By that point, the head must have broken the surface (FINA, 2013, p. 193).

By contrast, the other three competitive strokes, butterfly, backstroke, and breaststroke are defined in twelve, twelve, and nineteen sentences, respectively. The creative agency afforded to the freestyle swimmer highlights that the goal of the stroke is pure speed; there are no other constraints upon the stroke than those inherent in the logics of modern sport: the stroke must be fast, it must be rational, and it must be efficient. In this way, the crawl/freestyle represents a celebration of the ideologies of modern sport – that of striving for records (Adelman 1981; Guttmann 1978) and a modernistic ideal of dominating and controlling nature through rational practice. FINA's current rules indicate the stroke's ambiguities; a swimmer's only requirement is to get from one end of the pool

[18]Men and women swimmers swim a freestyle race at the following distances in the pool (all are in meters): 50, 100, 200, 400, 800 (women only), 1500 (men only), 4x100 relay, and 4x 200 relay. There are also freestyle "legs" in the 200 and 400 individual medleys and the 4x100 medley relay. There is also an open-water distance swim of 10-kilometers for both men and women, and every swimmer chooses to swim freestyle.

to the other while on the surface of the water. Freestyle is not constrained by specific body position (like the backstroke), nor is the freestyling body required to move in the synchronous ways that both breaststroke and butterfly require.

Constructing Whiteness and Sporting Racial Projects Within Colonialism

George Corsan (1924) begins the foreword of his influential *Diving and Swimming Book* with a compelling contention:

> Swimming is an art so little understood by the mass of humanity throughout the world that we must look for the cause in man's structure. Man's structural adaptability is more for climbing trees than for either running on the plain or swimming in the water…But I myself can swim faster and better than any dog I have ever seen yet (p. ix).

Within this condensed quotation we can see that underlying theme of modernization of conquering the natural world – both water and animals – through rational and practiced thought deployed through the body of the evolved Man. White racial hierarchy is further embedded when Corsan (1924) begins the first section of the book, titled "Man's Structural Nature," with similar imagery. The passage is worth quoting at length:

> From a structural standpoint man is better adapted for climbing than for either running or swimming. The Papuans can travel through swamps with remarkable rapidity, swinging from branch to branch, and white men who devote their time and energies to buying up the skins of the birds of paradise learn very quickly to travel as fast as the natives. But look at our fastest runners and match them against a short-legged dog in a race and what is man but a pitiful object! Then, again, throw any land animal into the water for the first time in its life, and it immediately sets up a running motion on the horizontal…Any land animal between a mouse and a moose will do the same. A dog, on first being thrown into the water, will often set up a jumping motion but will soon lie low and change to the dog-paddle action which it ever after assumes. While the short-legged dog can run faster than the long-legged man, yet the man will greatly outclass the dog in the water for speed and stunts—after long instruction (p. 1).

This passage is jarring to read now, nearly a century after it was published. In this historical moment, the casual assertion of "natives" quickly traveling through swamps swinging from branches makes cultural sensitivity bells ring in our heads. A construction of Whiteness emerges in Corsan's words. This passage – especially when linked to the quote from the foreword – is reliant upon a racial order that places white (men) on top, and connects the Papuans to the (lower) natural world, where they travel through swamps via trees.

Not only does this section demonstrate how learning and educated practice are linked to Whiteness, which is connected to the superior and interrelated practices of capitalism and colonization, but it also differentiates the aquatic practices of natives (and land animals) to what white men can do. Any living thing can survive or thrash in the water; it takes a rational (unafraid), intelligent (taught) white man to overcome his natural bodily structure in order to swim. In essence, the process Corsan (1924) references, in which a Man learns, through rational and modern methods, to overcome his structural in-adaptability and swim is a description of the *sporting racial project* of swimming: the Whitening of the sport.

Sporting racial projects such as swimming must be understood within a broader global context, especially in terms of their roles in the construction of the white colonial frame. Directly linked to structural and ideological practices of 19th century European colonialism, the white colonial frame is "the colonizer's view of the world," a self-fulfilling view grounded in values of modernity and rationality (Blaut, 1993). We are reminded that, "[f]ar from being a neutral description of objective social forces, relations and ways of thinking, the invocation of rationality operated as an ideological framework

for explaining 'superiority' of European economic and political progress to the rest of the world" (Carrington, 2010, p. 41).

Swimming and Watermanship (1922) is the only book that does not locate the origins of the crawl in Australia. Interestingly, Handley condenses the history of the crawl into the northern/western hemisphere, citing an older form of swimming, the Trudgeon stroke[19] as the only precursor to what is "essentially an American stroke, evolved from Frank Sullivan, a prominent Chicago instructor" (1922, p. 34). He credits Sullivan with inventing the technique by combining earlier approaches and then, "being a practical man" (Handley, 1922, p. 35), Sullivan tested the new stroke by teaching it to novice swimmers, and they became champions. Handley uses the discourse of modernity and progress to transfer the successful stroke to the United States.

Corsan (1924) writes that "the crawl stroke was introduced to the world at the beginning of this century, by [Richard] Cavill of Australia, who attached the Polynesian Indian's flutter leg action to the trudgeon stroke" (p. 35-36). Two years later, Handley and Howcroft credit Aleck Wickham, "a young native of Rubiana, then living in Sydney" for introducing the stroke to Australia in the late 19th century, where Cavill picked it up (1926, p. 9). All three men appear in Cureton's (1924) telling of the creation of the crawl; after writing that the Australian Cavill invented the stroke, he quotes Frank Sullivan at length. According to Sullivan, Cavill was looking for a way to beat the dominant English swimmers of the late 19th century, and "he [Cavill] remembered having seen Alec[k]

[19]Which is named after the Englishman John Trudgeon, and practitioners (Armbruster, 1973; Corsan 1924; Cureton, 1934) have cited it as a 19th century version of the crawl. This stroke is difficult to describe, but it is essentially a scissor kick with the alternating, over-water recovery and under-water pull that is synonymous with contemporary freestyle. I've attempted it and I have no idea how people did it for any extended distance.

Wickham, a fast young Rubiana sprinter, use an odd straight-legged kick, which he had learned from the natives at Colombo, Ceylon" (Cureton, 1924, p. 95). Cavill worked on this new technique for a short period and then used the imperfect version of it to nearly beat the Englishmen. This new approach inspired the many coaches who were at the important meet, and they improved upon it, and "soon the world was ringing with the news of the 'crawlers'" (*Ibid.*) Sullivan continues, first offering proof that, once he was able to perfect the new 'crawl,' Cavill was able to swim faster and further than Wickham ever did, and then he states that the stoke made it to America in 1904, where it was remodeled (Cureton, 1934).

Although he does introduce the importance of keeping one's swimming "movements…similar to those of the loose stride of an Indian on a long journey" (p. 5), Mann and Fries (1940) also ignore overt mention of Wickham in his re-telling of the history of the crawl. Similarly to Corsan (1934), Mann and Fries (1940) credit international competition – spurred on by the tenets of modern sport, namely the record book – for the innovation. He cites Australia's Cavill brothers for inventing the crawl while they were looking to improve upon the fast swims of the English. Almost immediately, their version was rendered obsolete, as competition inspired the Americans to create the "American crawl," which was dominant for quite some time until the Japanese "adopted certain modifications of the American crawl" and dominated the 1932 Olympics (Mann & Fries, 1940, p. 100-101). For Mann and Fries, the Japanese success, and the assured response of the American coaches and swimmers, is a testament to modern methods of swimming and the inspiration of competition. Mann and Fries (1940) close their book with what could be read as an implicit nod to Wickham:

> Today, as a result of a consciously developed technique, our champions are far superior to those natives of the South Sea Islands who live so much in the water and whose swimming prowess has been so highly praised (p. 102).

Gary Osmond and Murray Phillips (2004; 2006) examine the use of this "sport creation myth" to understand the constructions of social memory, the nation, and race in the re-presentations of the creation and invention of the crawl-stroke. They found that Wickham's role in the origins of the stroke was reliant upon romanticized stereotypes of native Pacific Islanders that "endeared Wickham to many swimming supporters in Australia" (Osmond & Phillips, 2006, p. 61). Furthermore, "the Wickham myth reinforces the commonly held belief, or macromyth, that non-white athletes have specific genetic and/or cultural advantages for sporting performances in specific activities" (Osmond & Phillips, 2006, p. 62). Part of the ideological work done by this origin myth naturalizes swimming the crawl in the body of a Pacific Islander native.

But, furthermore, the sport origin myth is an example of what Feagin (2010) called selective remembering and collective forgetting. Wickham was erased from the story of the creation of the stroke (Handley, 1922; Mann & Fries, 1940) or his role was re-remembered as marginal (Corsan, 1924; Cureton, 1934; Handley & Howcroft, 1926). Wickham's swimming body became the site for colonization and modernization, the natural resource to be mined and exploited through superior (white) methods. And, Whiteness is built upon that site through the discourse of modernity, using words such as "improve," "modify," "perfect," and "develop."

Earlier in this chapter, Corsan (1934) relates the crawl to a person's climbing a tree. Considering that body movement, especially in terms of popular understandings of

evolution, where man (who lives on land) descended from ape (who lives in trees), may illuminate the broader colonial relations shaping a *sporting racial project* such as swimming. Each expert mentioned this origin myth in some way -- and relied upon it as a way to initiate their modernization. But I want to call attention to the fact that the books also extended beyond Wickham.

Corsan (1934) linked the crawl to man's deep evolutionary past, where man lived in the natural world and needed to compete with wild animals for survival. Similarly, Handley (1922) argued that the modern strokes are easy to learn "because they are made up of movements closely resembling primitive man's natural mode of swimming, the dog paddle" (p. 14). Four years later, Handley and Howcroft credited Wickham while also stating[20] that there is "convincing evidence that this stroke is man's natural mode of aquatic progression" and that his successes, along with Hawaiian Duke Kahanamoku's successes, indicate that it was in common use in the Pacific Islands "as far back as the oldest aborigines could recall" (1926, p. 9-10).

Cureton's (1934) use of the Wickham creation myth plainly illustrates swimming as a *sporting racial project*. He quickly shifts from Wickham's introduction to the Australian's appropriation of and improvement upon the stroke. Cureton credited Richard Cavill, of the "world-famous" Australian swimming family, with closely observing Wickham's fast swimming style and then rationally working to perfect it through "experimentation." Rhetorically, this sets up Wickham's style as a natural style, a style to be improved upon through modern techniques and approaches. Because his goal is to direct the ways in which bodies move through aquatic space, Cureton (1934) is making a

[20]Without offering it.

direct positive intervention, and is re-presenting and celebrating the appropriation of embodied practice.

Corsan (1924) and Handley and Howcroft (1926) take this strategy as well. After mentioning Wickham, they then reduce his importance by putting Cavill's rational approach at the forefront of the "development" of the stroke. Corsan (1924) effectively dehumanized Wickham (and all other Pacific Islanders) by reducing him to a leg action, or a resource, to be appropriated in stating that "[t]he crawl stroke was introduced to the world at the beginning of this century [1900s], by Cavill of Australia who attached the Polynesian Indian's flutter leg action to the trudgeon stroke in place of the scissors kick, and made better time than he ever did before" (p. 36). Handley and Howcroft (1926) marginalize Wickham while simultaneously demonstrating an attitude of entitlement that rings true to a colonizer's view of the world: "[c]uriously, we did not inherit the crawl in its true form, but in rather *mutilated* condition, and it *took years of study* before we were able to reconstruct, standardize it and learn to take advantage of its many good points. Cavill, in fact, did not imitate Wickham very closely" (1926, p. 10; emphasis mine).

Within these portrayals of Cavill's rational improvements of a Pacific Islander's "natural stroke," we see the racial logics of colonialism that are an inherent part of modernization. Carrington (2010) uses cultural geographer James Blaut's critiques of Eurocentric diffusionism (1993) to explicate this relationship. Eurocentric diffusionism informs the broad understanding of the creation of modern sport: a model where sport is created by and spreads from the metropole of Western Europe[21]. As Carrington (2010)

[21]And, this is seen in swimming with the already noted description of FINA that the development of the sport of swimming "resulted from the needs provoked by the Industrial Revolution and urbanization at the

points out, "deeply racialized and gendered colonial tropes of social development" permeate this diffusionist model due to its reliance upon "binaries…of modernity/tradition, the rational/irrational and the civilized/primitive [that] work to structure how modern sport is defined and understood" (p. 45). Cureton (1934), Handley (1922), and Handley and Howcroft's (1926) descriptions of how the modern, rational, civilized, Australian Dick Cavill perfected Wickham's traditional, primitive stroke are examples of this binary construction and the selective remembering and forgetting that help to form the white racial frame (Feagin 2010). The fact that the crawl-stroke was then taken up by American swimming experts is another "step" in its modern evolution.

These binaries are written onto the bodies of both Cavill and Wickham. Cavill – who, ironically, is quickly marginalized by North American experts – represents how the deployment of modern, scientific ideas can tame and utilize the natural human body. The goal of these books was to teach these modern techniques. They intended on laying out these scientific, modern techniques for any body to learn and practice. One primary reason was to avoid drowning; Corsan (1924) dedicated his book to the 999 people out of a thousand who could not swim, while Handley (1922) argued that "up-to-date styles should universally adopted" in order to promote "self-protection and lifesaving" (p. 19).

While each expert centralized his work onto the body, Cureton's (1934) discussion of the swimming body was the most expansive. He summarized all of the available studies on the swimming body, finding that the studies indicate that "no other exercise approaches swimming for all-round development" and it "promotes a symmetrical development of arms and legs, of anterior-posterior posture, and of lateral

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end of the 19th century…[the] development began in England and spread to the European continent, to America and finally all over the world" (John, 1998, p. 17).

symmetry" (1934, p. 11-12). He continues, citing several studies that indicate swimming improves circulation, body temperature regulation, and respiratory development.

Corsan (1924) does not devote as much space to the corporeal benefits of swimming, but he too centers the swimming body, arguing that any body can learn to swim efficiently. But, he also utilizes body composition and specific gravity to offer adaptations of the crawl-stroke and to indicate that not all bodies can swim as efficiently as other bodies, i.e., "long-armed persons should take breath with each stroke" or "[the older method of the crawl is adaptable for] long rangy people of heavy specific gravity…but not for stiff-jointed, thick-set, chunky persons" (Corsan, 1924, p. 30).

Both Handley's solo effort and the book he co-authored with Howcroft concentrate on the body as well. Handley (1922) called swimming the best normalizer for the non-normal body and then set about to describe, in quite detail, the standard practices for the swimming body. The co-authored *Crawl-Stroke Swimming* (1926) is even more technical, where each part of the body (arm, head, shoulder, hands, legs) is "divided" into separate roles and they describe – in dense, technical terms – exactly how and what a crawl-stroking body should do and then called this collection of body movements the standard action for the crawl. They remind readers of the importance of this action by warning them that their "natural resources cannot be fully utilized unless standard action is followed to the letter" (Handley & Howcroft, 1926, p. 26). Thus, Handley and Howcroft's (1926) approach recalls and reinscribes notions of modernizing, colonizing, and standardizing the natural world through rational action.

My analysis of these books authored by early, foundational swimming practitioners illuminates how race and modern sport are co-productive. The work of

codifying and popularizing modern swimming is an example of a *sporting racial project* in that efficiency, rationality, logic are favorably mapped onto modern swimming practices, which are then embodied by white bodies. Thus, as Carrington (2010) maintains, sport is "productive…of racial discourse" by constructing a Whiteness that is efficient, rational, and logical, but also unremarked upon.

Conclusion

In his review of the critical whiteness literature, Kevin Hylton (2009) claims that Whiteness is often rendered invisible or normal. However, Frankenberg (2001) points out that, when considering the historical asymmetrical power relations between colonialism and Whiteness, the "notion that whiteness might be invisible seems bizarre in the extreme…it is only to the extent that particular kinds of racially supremacist hegemony are ever achieved that whiteness can come anywhere near to invisibility" (p. 76).

The very omnipresence of the white swimming body and the fact that only non-white swimming bodies are "raced" are exactly what makes the sport a useful site for exploring the construction of Whiteness. Furthermore, through the early constructions of the sport and the media celebrations of "raceless" swimmers like Michael Phelps, the white swimming body is imbued with all of the characteristics of modernity: rationality, order, efficiency, and mastery of the natural world. In this way, the discursive construction of the modern freestyle stroke exemplifies a sporting racial project and demonstrates how the theoretical tool can be used to understand how meanings of race are constructed through, and along with, sport.

The ways in which these experts utilize the origin myths of the crawl-stroke and deploy modern, rational thought onto the sport body demonstrates the construction of the

white colonial frame and its elemental roles in the (re)invention of contemporary practices of modern sport. The *sporting racial project* is a tool that uses sport to make sense of race, to understand how racial meanings are constructed through the discourses and practices of sport at the very same time that sport is producing race. Using this concept to reveal how Whiteness, the unmarked, normalized, foundation to our racist society, is benignly constructed through illustrations and descriptions of efficient modern swimming allows us to see that racism is not only about barriers to entry, but is also about creating structures of privilege so deeply embedded that they are easy to miss – just like seeing only white bodies in a swimming pool and never thinking twice about it. The taken-for-grantedness of swimming bodies as White bodies, and the subsequent obscuring of the colonial and racist processes, are particularly important when it comes to Olympic sport. To many people, Olympians are physical and symbolic embodiments of the Nation and this representation matters when it comes to making meanings of the American nation, especially in times of national crisis, like post-9/11 America.

CHAPTER 3: Nationalizing Michael Phelps

Swimming has been a part of the every modern Olympics games, and the United States has been very successful. No American man won a medal at the 1896 Athens or 1900 Paris games (Daland, 2009), but beginning in St. Louis in 1904, American men swimmers have been dominant[22]. Even including the 1980 Olympics boycotted by the US Olympic team, the US men have won 294 Olympic swimming medals out of a total 857 awarded, and 135 of those medals have been gold. US men have won more than one-third (34.3%) of every medal awarded, meaning that, statistically speaking, an American man is on the medal podium for every Olympic swimming event[23]. Given the symbolic importance of the Olympics, this exceptional level of dominance alone makes the sport of swimming an important site for exploring the construction of American national identity.

Like all Olympians, Michael Phelps is "a representative of [his] nation, both symbolically and on the national team" (Walton, 2010, p. 285), and he is a particularly successful and visual (sporting) representative of the American nation[24]. Michael Phelps has worn the United States flag while competing in every summer Olympics of the 21st century (2000 Sydney; 2004 Athens; 2008 Beijing; 2012 London). Due to his accomplishments – winning eighteen gold, two silver, and two bronze medals – the Star-Spangled Banner was raised and the U.S. national anthem was played on foreign soil in celebration for him a dozen and a half times. His record-breaking achievements – while

[22]Dyreson (1998) reports that the lone American swimmer at Athens "found the Aegean sea much too cold for springtime swimming" (p. 48). Women did not swim in the Olympics until 1912 and the American women did not compete until after World War 1, in 1920 (Daland, 2009; olympic.org).
[23] These are all based on my own research from tabulating the official IOC results (olympic.org).
[24] Although I realize potential problematics, I use the term "America(n)" here and throughout this chapter interchangeably with "United States" or "United States of America." I do this because the media sources I draw from follow this practice, but it also calls attention to the cultural production of the nation, rather than the political creation of a nation-state.

wearing the red-white-and-blue over/on his white male body – make him a potent symbol of the United States. Representations of Michael Phelps situate him firmly within what Kyle Kusz calls white cultural nationalism (2001; 2007a; 2007b). The processes of white cultural nationalism were "reenergized and reformulated" by the events of 9/11 (Kusz 2007a, p. 79), but the processes to which Kusz refer stretched back to conservative responses to the 1960s civil rights era gains made by minorities, and gained momentum in the late 20th century. In this chapter, I examine how mediated representations of Michael Phelps construct a racialized nationalism primarily through a conflation of Whiteness and America into the 21st century.

Construction of Phelps as American is more than a mere conflation of the identity categories of *Whiteness* and *American*. Phelps's ascendancy to cultural import occurred in a time of great turmoil for the American nation – both in and out of sporting realms. The late 20th-century backlash against the social gains made by women, gays and lesbians, and racial minorities was accelerated by the events of 9/11[25] and the Bush Administration's responses where, in the space of thirteen months, they declared the War on Terror to both houses of Congress; wrote and passed the PATRIOT ACT; identified an Axis of Evil consisting of Iran, Iraq, and North Korea, as a "threat to the peace of the world"; and created a new security agency with the Homeland Security Act in November 2002. All of these Presidential actions re-instantiated conservative notions of American nationhood and perpetuated the general sense that American nationhood was under attack, both literally and ideologically (Chomsky, 2003; Nayak, 2006; Ross, 2005).

[25]A coordinated attack by Islamic fundamentalist group Al-Qaeda who, in continuing its earlier actions against American targets (USS Cole, US Embassy), high-jacked commercial airplanes and flew them into physical symbols of the US economic and military hegemony (the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.), killing thousands of people.

American prestige and status was similarly under siege in the sporting world. Many American sporting stars were embroiled in doping scandals[26]. Leading up to the Athens Games, the first post-9/11 Summer Olympics and the first Olympics after the United States' military invasion of Iraq in the spring of 2003, the United States Olympic Committee used a video package of athletes' bad behavior from Sydney Olympics to advise the 2004 team "to adopt a low-key approach" and avoid being "ugly Americans" in Athens (McMullen, 2006, p. 174)[27].

Additionally, media coverage of professional black athletes during this time often equated blackness, hip-hop, and criminality. After a disappointing sixth place finish at the 2002 World Championships, the once-dominant American men's basketball team was "embarrassed" and "humiliated" on their way towards their worst Olympic finish ever: a bronze medal at the 2004 Olympics (Dupree, 2004; Kimble, 2014). The racialized coverage of the "failure" of the twelve black men representing the USA in Athens was compounded during the following NBA season.

The 2004 "Palace Melee" – when Indiana Pacer Ron Artest went into the stands after a Detroit Pistons fan threw a cup of ice onto him – demonstrated to many that hip-hop culture and black criminality was corrupting the post-Jordan NBA. The Melee "represented a moment when the blackness of the league was irrefutable and thus needed

[26]Major league baseball was plagued with accusations that performance-enhancing substances fueled and inflated the record numbers put up by sluggers such as Barry Bonds and Mark McGwire. Marion Jones, the face of American track and field at the Sydney Games with her five-medal performance, was quickly toppled when investigations of the performance-enhancing drug use by major leaguers implicated her (McMullen, 2006). Lance Armstrong won the Tour de France from 1999-2005, but was forced to give up these titles in 2012 after many of the doping allegations proved to be true. He is no longer an official winner of the Tour de France and is banned from competing in cycling (Macur, 2012).

[27] "In Sydney, swimmer Amy Van Dyken had spat in an opponent's lane, and a track relay team that included Maurice Greene and Baltimorean Bernard Williams tainted its gold medal celebration with over-the-top preening" (McMullen, 2006, p. 174).

to be managed, controlled, and, if necessary, destroyed" (Leonard, 2012, p. 3). The longstanding racial ideology linking blackness to athleticism (Carrington, 2010; Wiggins, 2014) and blackness to criminality often equated black athletes with criminality in the media (Cunningham, 2009; Leonard, 2012; Kusz, 2011).

Like the proverbial White Knight, Michael Phelps emerges in this time of national crisis (Giroux, 2003; Kusz, 2007a; 2015; Silk, 2012). Phelps participated in a sport on the global stage, with his white body enrobed in the Red, White, and Blue. The sport he dominated, swimming, is steeped in the ideology of meritocracy and the discourse of individual success. Its Whiteness and strong association with the Olympics and their ideological construction of the pure ideal athlete (Lenskyj, 2000) help it – and him – serve as a corrective to the problems of blackness bedeviling 21st century American professional sport. While representations of Phelps certainly do continue the long-standing work of conflating Whiteness and American-ness, these representations are also a part of an "ongoing cultural process of attempting to re-secure a privileged position for white masculinity in American culture at a time when its privileged status and relationship might have been destabilized but was certainly not dismantled" (Kusz, 2015, p. 228), and re-centered American traditional values of hard-work and meritocracy onto his taken-for-granted white swimming body.

I demonstrate how representations of Phelps over the course of his Olympic career privilege individual success through descriptions of the sport of swimming and construct his white American swimming body as the physical embodiment of the American nation through implicit and explicit comparison to other athletes, specifically by juxtaposing the representations of Phelps with the bronze-medal-winning 2004 men's

United States basketball team. The American nation he embodies is white, masculine, hardworking, individual, and successful.

Reading Michael Phelps

Michael Phelps's unprecedented Olympic success over the first dozen years of this century resulted in intense media coverage: a database search for Michael Phelps yields several thousand articles. In exploring how Olympic runner Paula Radcliffe represented the British nation, Theresa Walton (2010) narrowed her analysis to three particular events and then examined how notions of nation were constructed individually and across these events. Walton (2010) used the reading sport methodology advocated by Susan Birrell and Mary McDonald (2000; McDonald & Birrell, 1999) to analyze how power relations are present in media representations of sporting events, celebrities, or incidents through reading them like a text.

I use this methodology to read Michael Phelps as a text to investigate how a racialized American nationalism is constructed via mediated representations of him. Following Walton's model, I analyze themes that emerged during each of four Olympic years and then follow how these themes continue across Games to create a coherent narrative of the 21st century American nation written on the white swimming body of Michael Phelps. Furthermore, I demonstrate how Phelps became the idealized American body by comparing media representations of him to some of his contemporary Olympians: the 2004 all-black men's basketball team who won the bronze, the first time the USA men's basketball did not win the gold since first using NBA basketball players in 1992.

I use "Michael Phelps, Greatest Olympian of All-Time" as an entry point to examine how sport, race, and nationalism co-articulate so I focus on media representations of Phelps during the Olympic years of 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012. A Lexis-Nexis search revealed over 3000 newspaper and magazine articles for Phelps during those four Olympics years. Because I am interested in constructions of American nationalism, I narrowed my search to prominent nationwide newspapers that covered Phelps during each year, and therefore selected the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *USA Today*, which resulted in over 200 articles. I analyzed over 20 articles from national magazines, *Sports Illustrated, Newsweek, Rolling Stone* and *TIME*. And, in order to get insight from within the swimming community, I found nearly 60 articles about Phelps's Olympic career within the monthly *Swimming World*[28].

Each Olympic year yielded a variation on the dominant narrative of Phelps. In 2000, he was presented as the youngest man to swim for the US Olympic team since 1932 when he finished fifth in his only event. At Athens in 2004, he was the young versatile upstart hoping to break the hallowed record of Olympic legend Mark Spitz who "failed" in only winning six gold and two bronze medals (Barrett, 2004; Zinser, 2004c, 2004j). Four years later, in Beijing, he was the most dominant swimmer in the world who successfully set the new record for most gold medals at one Olympics (eight) and total gold medals (fourteen) (Araton, 2008; Casey, 2008b; Crouse, 2008f, 2008g, 2008h; Shipnuck, 2008). And, finally[29], in London in 2012, he approached the games as a fitting end to his legacy in becoming the most decorated Olympian ever, breaking Soviet

[28]And, while they do not make up a significant part of my analysis, I strategically use parts of his two autobiographies, *Beneath the Surface* (2012) and *No Limits: The Will to Succeed* (2009), as supporting evidence.

[29]Before, during, and after London 2012, he announced they would be his final games. However, in April 2015 Phelps announced he would seek to earn a berth on the 2016 Olympic swimming team.

gymnast Larisa Latynina's record of eighteen (Brady, 2012a, 2012c; Brennan, 2012; Crouse, 2012c; Lohn, 2012b; Moore, 2012). *Sports Illustrated*'s Tim Layden encapsulated the broader dominant narrative of Phelps's career in a story about the Olympian's return: "[Phelps's] story had the perfect arc: In 2000 he was a prodigy; in '04 he was brilliant but imperfect; in '08 he was unbeatable; in '12 he was a legend on his farewell tour, diminished but still great" (2015, p. 54).

Sport and Nationalism

Sport is one of the most common ways in which nationalisms are articulated (for examples, see Bairner, 2001; Jackson, 1994; Walton, 2010), and the Olympics are a primary site for displays of sporting nationalism. Allen Guttmann (2002) argues that the modern Olympics emerged out of founder Baron de Coubertin's 19th century liberalism that privileged individual liberty, but held national identity as a core aspect of individual identity. As such,

> the IOC [International Olympic Committee] created an institutional structure based on national representation: no athlete can compete as an individual; every athlete must be selected by his or her country's national Olympic committee; every athlete…must wear a national uniform; when a victor is honored, a national flag is raised and a national anthem is played (Guttmann, 2002, p. 2).

The Modern Olympics are dependent upon the modern construction of the Nation. The Olympic rules and practices reveal how the "invented traditions" (Hobsbawm, 1983) that create nations are part of the fundamental infrastructure of the modern Olympics. For instance, Michael Phelps cannot swim at the Olympics as a representative of his club team (North Baltimore Aquatic Club; Club Wolverine), his school (Towson High School; University of Michigan), his city (Baltimore; Ann Arbor), his sponsors (Speedo; VISA),

or his state (Maryland; Michigan). If he wants to swim at the Olympics Games, the ultimate meet for swimmers, he must swim for his nation.

Currently, each nation is allowed to have no more than two representatives in each individual swimming event, provided that they meet the qualifying times set by FINA, the world swimming federation. Each swimmer must compete in FINA sanctioned swimwear (swimsuits, caps, goggles) marked by the nation, including colors (red, white, and blue), animals (kangaroo), or other symbols (maple leaf). The multicolor, multinational swim races – where representatives of the United States literally compete with representatives from Australia, Canada, Japan, France, China, etc. – are symbolically powerful for competitors and spectators, and demonstrate why the Olympics are an ideal site for exploring the meanings of Nation and the roles sport plays in those meanings. Each time these national representatives dive into the water while wearing the symbols of their nations, they are reinforcing and reifying the logics of modernity and the notion of the nation.

These aquatic national representatives race against one another and the clock. The sport's reliance on stopwatches and head-to-head races within standardized rules and regulations creates an assumption of a level playing field. The ideological implications of national representatives racing each other makes sense at the most fundamental level – the winning nation is better – but the idea of racing the objective clock may be just as important. In part, the clock standardizes the race and allows for the present swimmers to be measured against former swimmers. Such confidence in universal measurements perpetuates the modern notion of progress and works to construct a cultural national

identity via historicizing the nation by offering and allowing for constant references to its past accomplishments (Hall, 1992).

White Cultural Nationalism

On the clear blue morning of September 11, 2001, nineteen religious extremist terrorists hijacked four commercial airplanes departing major airports in Boston and New York. The terrorists took control of the planes and used them as missiles to crash into the two World Trade Center Towers in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C, killing themselves and 2,977 other people and terrifying millions more watching live on television across the nation[30]. The attacks on 9/11 occurred over one and half decades ago, but they still "shape the material and symbolic worlds we inhabit…[and will] continue to shape public conversation, what it means to be 'normal'/'American' and thus 'abnormal'/other, military policy, economic strategizing, lawmaking, the arts, entertainment, news coverage, education, and religion" (Silk, 2012, p. 1).

As president during the worst attack within the nation's borders, George W. Bush shaped much of the response to 9/11. As part of his initial response, President Bush announced a War on Terror on September 20, 2001. This War on Terror was wide-ranging, and positioned any threat to American values, Americans, or the American way of life as a battleground in the War on Terror (e.g., "if you see something, say something") (Bloodsworth-Lugo & Lugo-Lugo, 2010; Chomsky, 2003). His rhetoric created dichotomies that both reflected and created an "Us" versus "Them" or Good versus Evil black-and-white binary where the United States is Good and all those who wish harm to it are Evil (Bloodsworth-Lugo & Lugo-Lugo, 2010; Chomsky, 2003;

[30] The fourth plane was allegedly en route to a target in Washington, D.C. as well, but crashed in Pennsylvania after a group of passengers overtook the terrorists.

Giroux, 2003; Nayak, 2006). This rhetoric was powerful in painting any opposition to the President and his plans as "un-American," creating an a-critical citizenship as ideal (Giroux, 2003).

Furthermore, these constructions – rooted in longstanding racialized and gendered notions of American-ness and Other-ness (Nayak, 2006; Ross, 2005) – often worked to make white men the ideal bodies to represent American-ness and "allow[ed] American national identity to be imagined mainly through representations of white men registered as individuals" (Kusz, 2015, p. 229). Police officers, firemen, and rescue workers were the focus of many of these media representations after 9/11 (McAlister, 2005), but some (white male) athletes were represented in these kinds of ways too.

Swimming is a sporting racial project co-produced by and co-producing racialized processes of colonialism and modernity. These historic sporting processes that shape both Michael Phelps and his sport exemplify "the powers that produce whiteness as normative" (McDonald, 2005, p. 246). As such, media representations of Phelps must be contextualized in order to understand the kind of American nation constructed throughout his Olympic years. As Kusz (2007a, 2007b) suggests, white cultural nationalism is a distinct sort of nationalism produced by and through the millennial and post-9/11 processes, the same cultural contexts in which Phelps lives and reached acclaim.

Kusz formulates the concept of white cultural nationalism by focusing on media representations of white athletes Andre Agassi, Lance Armstrong (2007a), Pat Tillman (2007b, 2015), or sports dominated by white participants like "extreme sports" (2007a) and NASCAR (2007b) who are "made to represent all those Americans invested in the 'traditional' values and fundamental ideologies for which America has always stood

(individualism, freedom, and meritocracy are mentioned most often)" (Kusz, 2007a, p. 175). White cultural nationalism arose during the 1990s in response to Civil-Rights era gains made by minority groups, and many cultural conservatives saw these gains as assaults on mainstream American values (Kusz 2001, 2007a, 2007b). Within this milieu, popular sporting representations create an "elevated place [for] the white male (athlete)" and "reasserts an old, if not forgotten, and distinctly white, masculinity" (Silk, 2012, p. 67).

The events of 9/11 served to consolidate and accelerate this conservative version of nationalism, when "Americans were urged to set aside our 'petty' social differences/divisions (i.e., namely those related to race, class, and gender)" (Kusz, 2007a, p. 140). This understanding of race as a social difference or division is rooted in a broader late-20th century reformulation of race as cultural rather than biological that "provides a basis for blaming minorities for their inferior positions, since it faults their supposedly deficient cultures; simultaneously, it exonerates whites, since racism is no longer to blame for inequality" (Haney-Lopez, 2014, p. 93). Thus, social and economic disparities resulting from decades of systemic and institutional racism have been reduced to issues of cultural practices. In neoliberal, post-9/11 America, culture is reduced to individual identity, and race and racism is reduced to private prejudices and individual behaviors (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Giroux, 2003, 2004).

Furthermore, Giroux (2004) argues that this new racism blames social inequalities on individuals from minority groups "for not working hard enough, refusing to exercise individual initiative, or practicing reverse-racism" (p. 57). At the same time, successful people of color like Michael Jordan or Tiger Woods are held up as counter evidence to

show that members of minority groups who choose to work hard and take advantage of their opportunities can succeed in America (Andrews & McDonald, 2001; Cole & Andrews, 2001; McDonald, 1996). Such power-evasive understandings of race flatten and erase historical, social, cultural, and political structures and processes that have privileged whites and oppressed people of color. These same understandings also redeem whites for their "lack [of] malice…[and] compliments whites on a superior culture that explains their social position," thereby implicitly and a-critically reifying ideologies of meritocracy (Haney-Lopez, 2014, p. 187). Additionally, they reify understandings of race and racism as individual attitudes and behaviors while ignoring systemic and institutional racisms.

The narrative of the nation constructed through representations of Michael Phelps epitomizes white cultural nationalism by suturing the "traditional values" of meritocracy and individual success onto the process of making the world-class athlete Michael Phelps into a typical, "normal" American. The media normalizes Phelps by discussing his youthful avid consumerism, highlighting his familial relationships, and reframing his legal indiscretions as common "mistakes" rather than as criminal acts or indicators of his character. White cultural nationalism is created through representations of Phelps occurred within the 21st century (sporting) world and within the discourse of a "colorblind" America that is both constitutive of and constitutes cultural racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Haney-Lopez, 2014) while also discursively constructing an America through an ideology of meritocracy best exemplified by Phelps's own recollection of how he felt after his historic performance in Beijing,

> I felt profound humility at learning how I had become a source of inspiration for so many back home, everyone who said *I offered renewed proof that America and Americans could still take on the world* with courage and grit, who declared that the virtues so many Americans hold so dear—hard work, character, commitment to family, team, country—could still triumph. (Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009, p. 4; emphasis added)

Selecting a Nation

Athletes can participate in the Olympic games only when participating as official representatives of their IOC-sanctioned nation, represented by the National Olympic Committee[31]. The United States Olympic Committee (USOC) provides organizational structure and resources for each national sporting federation to select the Olympic and Paralympic teams for their sport. USA Swimming governs competitive swimming in the United States, and therefore organizes the selection process for the American Olympic swimming teams.

American teams have long dominated both swimming and basketball at the Olympics, and USA Basketball is the basketball analog to USA Swimming. However, the two national federations' selection processes differ. The swimming team is determined by a meet that requires athletes to race against each other for the allotted roster spots, which go to the fastest performers. Administrators, coaches, and executives select the men's basketball team is selected from a list of NBA players, purportedly based on individual performance and availability. The different selection processes are framed as "earned" (swimming) and "chosen" (men's basketball) by the media. America's aquatic representatives earn their spots onto the Olympic team through competition at an

[31] There are exceptions to this rule, generally when athletes from nations not yet recognized by the IOC (usually due to broad geo-political issues like war) compete as independent Olympians, under the Olympic flag. In London 2012, marathoner Guor Marial was allowed to compete as an independent Olympian because his home nation, South Sudan, did not yet have a recognized National Olympic Committee and he refused to compete for Sudan (Smith, 2012).

Olympic Trials and members of the men's USA Olympic Basketball team are chosen through a behind-closed-doors process.

USA Swimming: Earned Representation

In his autobiographies, Phelps argues that most Americans see swimming as solely "an every-four-year sport" – or an Olympic sport[32] (2009; 2012). This quadrennial focus makes the Olympic games *the* meet for American swimmers. As a result, the Olympic Trials, where the aquatic representatives for the United States are selected, generally serve as the (re)introduction of Michael Phelps and his fellow American swimmers to the American public. The Trials receive a large amount of coverage in both the mainstream and swimming-centric media[33]. Throughout their coverage, the Trials are unequivocally rendered as a paragon of American Exceptionalism and meritocracy; most journalists portray USA Swimming's method of choosing a team as the objective ideal because every Olympic swimmer earns his or her spot on the team through head-to-head competition at the Trials.

The Trials are administered and executed by USA Swimming, and, therefore, are carried out within the structures of FINA. According to FINA rules, each nation can be represented by up to two athletes in each individual Olympic event – provided that the swimmers meet qualifying standards (or "cuts"), which were introduced for the 2004

[32] For example, *Sports Illustrated* has a section for covering such sports called "Inside Olympic Sports," one of which was swimming; generally these sports are relegated to this section in non-Olympic years. An example is "Free Spirited" by Phil Taylor (2008).

[33]Each of Phelps's Trials took place in the month prior to the Olympics (August 2000; July 2004; June-July 2008; July 2012). Here are the articles that both explicitly covered the Trials and explicitly mentioned Michael Phelps: (Anderson, 2008; Ballard, 2008; Crouse, 2008b, 2008c, 2008d, 2012a, 2012b; Lohn, 2004b, 2004c, 2008, 2012a; Longman, 2000; Lydersen, 2000; Marsteller & Lohn, 2008; Michaelis, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004e; Morales, 2004a, 2004b; Naughton, 2008; Shipley, 2008a, 2012a; Svrulga, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c; Ward, 2008; Whitten, 2000, 2004a; Zinser, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d, 2004e).

games[34]. Each national team roster can have up to twenty-six men and twenty-six women, and each nation can choose how it selects its own Olympic team, with the only requirement being that the qualifying standards are met at a sanctioned meet within a certain time period[35].

One primary theme of the coverage of the Trials is the sheer depth of swimming talent in the United States. Unlike other nations, the United States has never had difficulties finding swimmers to meet the "A" qualifying times, so there are always two American swimmers in every individual event (Marsteller & Lohn, 2008; Morales, 2004a). America's historic depth of swimming talent plays an ideological role in mediated representations of the Olympic Trials during Phelps's Olympic swimming career. Morales (2004a) calls American swimming "a dynasty [that] has been going strong for over a century" (p. 25), while Marsteller and Lohn (2008) observe that, "simply because of the depth of talent that exists in the United States" (p. 15), the Trials

[34]According to Morales (2004a), FINA created the Olympic qualifying standards "after the likes of Eric Moussambani and Paula Barila Bolopa from Equitorial Guinea made a mockery of the 2000 swimming competition by appearing in the meet without ever having seen a starting block before" (p. 25). He maintains that the standards are slow enough to allow swimmers from nations with "less developed swimming programs" to participate in the Olympics, but fast enough to prohibit non-world-class swimmers (like the aforementioned black African swimmers) (*Ibid.*). FINA legitimizes the implementation of time standards as a means for managing the amount of meet participants.

[35] The A-cut is based on the previous Olympics' 16th place finish in the event, and the B-cut is 3.5% slower (FINA, 2015). Any nation with two swimmers faster than an A-cut can enter both of those swimmers, and any nation with only one swimmer meeting the B-cut can enter that one swimmer. For instance, Michael Phelps won the 200-meter individual medley at the London 2012 Olympics with a time of 1:54.27, and Canadian Andrew Ford finished 16th in the preliminary heats with a time of 2:00.28 (olympic.org). Therefore, the A qualifying time for the 200 IM at the upcoming 2016 Olympics is a 2:00.28; the B-cut is 3.5% slower, and is a 2:04.39. However, in order for a nation to have two swimmers, they must both meet the A-time qualifying standard. If a nation only has one swimmer with an A-cut and two swimmers with a B-cut, that nation can only have one representative in that event, and it must be one of those swimmers (fina.org). The FINA qualifying period is generally about 12-18 months; the 2016 qualifying time lasts from March 1, 2015 until July 3, 2016. The 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympic games are scheduled to begin August 5 and end on August 21, with the swimming program occurring in its traditional first week slot. The Trials announces its qualifying standards before the official FINA standards are released, but they are usually relatively close to the B-cuts, meaning that almost every one of the US's swimmers who qualify to *compete* for a spot on the American Olympic team are already technically qualified for the Olympics swimming competition.

may be a faster and more pressure packed meet than any other meet in the world, including the Olympic games. John Lohn (2012a) calls the Trials the "cruelest sporting event in the world…given the talent and depth of the United States, it's difficult enough to rank among the 10 best performers in the country. However, since there are only two Olympic invitations available for each individual event, it is that much more difficult just to make the Olympic team" (p. 8). Phelps echoes these claims in his autobiographies, and it is high praise when he calls America's Trials the "most difficult in the world" (Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009, p. 34). Indeed, the win-or-go-home system is "not for the faint of heart" (Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2012, p. 69), but earning a spot on the team is the "American way, at least in swimming" (Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009, p. 33).

Stories of two swimmers who could have represented other nations at the Olympics illustrate how portrayals of America's historic depth of talent are articulated into ideologies of American Exceptionalism and meritocracy. Hayley McGregory, "one of the best backstrokers in the world," set the world record in the 100-meter backstroke during the 2008 Trials but did not make the American team because she broke the record during the qualifying heats and finished a close third during the final heat (Ballard, 2008, p. 128). Later in the week, McGregory finished third in the 200-meter backstroke, repeating her double-third placing from the 2004 Trials[36]. McGregory was born in England and, thus, could have competed for Great Britain. But, the ultra-competiveness of the Trials that makes qualification difficult also entices athletes. For McGregory, swimming for the British "was a cop-out…the easy way to the Games" (quoted in

[36]Further demonstrating the depth of quality of American swimming, Ballard (2008) points out that McGregory's third place time at the 2008 Trials was fast enough to have won the gold at the Athens Olympics.

Ballard, 2008, p. 128).

Matt Grevers placed behind world-class swimmers in his events at the 2004 Trials and he, like McGregory, had a chance to swim for another nation (Crouse, 2008a). Grevers resisted the Netherlands's invitation because "I wanted it to mean something if I swam in the Olympics. I didn't want to just get handed a spot" (Crouse, 2008a, p. 11). Rather than swimming for the Dutch in Athens, Grevers continued his training and later qualified – and medaled – as an American at Beijing. Not only is the depth of American swimming evident in the stories of these swimmers, but so too is the understanding that a berth on the American team both is and should be earned rather than given. Olympic swimming coach Eddie Reese articulates these links in praising the "win-or-stay-home… system" because "it's the American way. You just shouldn't ever think it's going to be easy" (Michaelis, 2004b, p. 1C).

A *Swimming World* preview of the 2004 Olympic Trials further illustrates how the Trials are represented in the media as a site for American swimming dominance and ideologies of American Exceptionalism and meritocracy. Swimming journalist Tito Morales (2004a) invokes these ideals by describing the Trials as a winnowing down from 250,000 competitive swimmers in USA Swimming to the nearly 650 who qualify for the Trials, and then, finally, down to the nearly 50 swimmers who actually qualify to represent the nation as members of "the most storied Olympic team in history" (p. 24). He attributes America's historic Olympic dominance directly to this open and competitive selection process.

Morales (2004a) stresses that the swimming team is selected objectively, so the

"process holds no randomness. There are no ifs, ands, or buts. It matters not *who* you know or even *what* you know. It's all about what you *do*...Such purity is at once refreshing and beautiful in its straightforward simplicity" (p. 24; emphasis original). Morales notes that this method of choosing our national swimming team has a long history; American swimming heroes of the past like Duke Kahanamoku and Johnny Weissmuller had to earn their spots on the team too. The American practice of objectively picking a team from a talent-rich reserve is "the biggest reason…our athletes have performed so well on the world's biggest swimming stage" because the Trials' ultra-competitive environment "hardens" them (Morales, 2004a, p. 25). Morales advances and privileges understandings of objectiveness and egalitarianism as inherent to the *American* process while simultaneously extending the meritocratic tradition of selecting the national team back into the past and linking meritocracy to American identity.

American sport has long been a site for demonstrations and portrayals of ideologies of American Exceptionalism (Brown, 2007; Dyreson, 2007; Sage, 1990). For Michael Phelps and swimming, these ideologies are produced through descriptions of the Trials as an ultra-competitive, pressure-packed meet where the fastest swimmers in the world race head-to-head for the chance to represent America, long the most dominant swimming nation in the world. By emerging victorious from this crucible, Phelps has demonstrated his worth as an American, as a swimmer, and as a person. Not only has he earned his spot on the national team, but he embodies American values like competition, fair play, and merit-based individual achievement through his performance at Trials.

The common understanding that a spot on the national team must be earned

implies a level-playing field, as if any hardworking person could earn a berth on the team. It also constructs a notion of the American nation that is rooted in meritocracy by implying that swimmers who do not earn a berth on the Olympic team do not deserve to represent the nation. Such an exclusive discursive construction of the nation such is problematic when considering the sport historically and when we consider how contemporary notions of a colorblind society work to erase racial inequalities (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Haney-Lopez, 2014). Constant reification of meritocracy ignores the historical, cultural, and social power relationships that prohibited many people of color from swimming. The vast majority of swimmers are white in part due to past (and current) social and cultural exclusionary practices. But, constant references to earning one's spot on the national team makes the uninformed, apathetic, or ignorant reader think that the American Olympic swimming team is over 90 percent white (Crouse, 2012b) due to merit alone, furthering expunging the historical processes contributing to racial inequities and reinforcing the conflation of white with American because of the overrepresentation of white swimmers on the American team.

Morales (2004a), Lohn (2012a), and Phelps and Abrahamson (2009) locate meritocracy within the sport of swimming, and specifically in the American Trials. They also contrast the merit-based selection process in their sport to what they perceive as the less difficult and/or more subjective selective processes of other sports, such as track and field or team sports where coaches and administrators choose the national representatives based on less-than-objective standards. In 2004, the USA Track and Field and USA Swimming Olympic Trials were running concurrently for the first time. Journalist Vicki Michaelis (2004b) compared the two events. Both teams carried much of the burden of

the USOC's public goal of earning 100 medals at Athens because of their mutual "unrivaled tradition and depth" (Michaelis, 2004b, p. 2). While the mostly black track & field athletes avoided discussing the "burgeoning drug scandal," the mostly white and assumed clean sport of swimming enjoyed the positive attention brought on by the comparison between the two sports (*Ibid.*). Michaelis further highlighted the extra pressure put on American swimmers because – as opposed to track and field, which allows three athletes per nation per event – the FINA rule limiting two swimmers per event usually "winnow[s] Olympic medal contenders from the [dominant] U.S. team" (*Ibid.*). This juxtaposition of the teams further articulates swimming and whiteness with meritocracy and American-ness.

USA Basketball: Chosen Representation

Racialized understandings of selecting the national representatives are further highlighted in contrast to the fact that the roster spots for the 2004 men's Olympic basketball team were chosen by a committee rather than earned by the player on the court (or in the pool). This team, made up entirely of young black men, lost three games on its way to earning a bronze medal, making them least successful of any American men's Olympic basketball team (Associated Press, 2004; Hack, 2004c; Powell, 2004; Rhoden, 2004a). The team's "embarrassing" (Roberts, 2004, p. D3; Hack, 2004c, p. D5) or "humiliating" (Robbins, 2004b, D3) loss to Puerto Rico in their opening game led to several journalists questioning the team's selection and preparation process. Some criticisms blamed the team directors and the NBA for selecting a team "that left them with the youngest (average age 23.8) of the United States Olympic teams with professional players" (Hack, 2004c, p. D5), and lacked "players capable of pulling off the

mundane" skills needed in the international game "based on expert shooting and death by a thousand backdoor cuts" (Roberts, 2004, p. D3). Other criticisms were leveled at the players who chose not to play on the Olympic team (Hack, 2004c; Kepner, 2004; Roberts, 2004; Robbins, 2004a)[37]. Co-captain Allen Iverson "chastised his peers who chose to stay home" by questioning their patriotism and selfishness (Hack, 2004c, p. D5).

The journalists who refrained from criticizing the non-attending players did, however, offer suggestions for improving the team selection process. Most suggestions relied upon the idea of creating more time for the players to learn how to play as a team in order to make up for the gains made by other national teams since 1992 (Associated Press, 2004; Hack, 2004b, 2004c; Kepner, 2004; Powell, 2004; Rhoden, 2004a). Other national teams were said to be composed of veterans who had played together for years while "learn[ing] a controlled team game that can trump athletic talent" (Powell, 2004, p. SP6). Selena Roberts (2004) argued that the USA Basketball team's marketing-centric selection process was a "symbol of excess, corporate largesse and decadence…the trifecta of anti-Americanism" as opposed to selecting the best team (p. D3). Interestingly, Roberts called for the selection process to go "retro," suggesting two white "milquetoast" players, Brent Barry and John Stockton, as the kind of players who actually help a team win (*Ibid.*).

The Athens 2004 men's basketball team "fail[ed] to fulfill the most essential obligation of American athletes—dominating the world's competition" (Leonard, 2012, p. 150) while Michael Phelps embraced competition as a "true sportsman" (Sokolove,

[37]Some players passed on playing in Athens due to fatigue and injury after the long NBA season, while others cited concerns about security in the first post-9/11 and post-Iraq invasion Summer Games.

2004, p. 54) and became the most decorated Olympian in Athens. The team also came to represent the overwhelmingly black NBA players, a league whose players were depicted as immature, uneducated, selfish, unmotivated, and lazy – coverage that reached a zenith with the men's Olympic team at Athens in 2004. The team roster was entirely black, and the racialized coverage of the team is striking when juxtaposed with the pre-Athens coverage of Phelps and the USA Swimming team. In the end, the bronze-medal winning team was a "failure" (Kepner, 2004, p. D5) ostensibly because of its youth, its inability to play team basketball, the subjective selection process, and some players lack of motivation (Associated Press, 2004; Hack, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; Kepner, 2004; Roberts, 2004; Robbins, 2004a).

In essence, framing – even celebrating – the Olympic swimming team selection process as one of meritocracy utilizes American and sporting ideologies of competition to make it appear that the 93% white swimmers objectively and fairly earned their spot on the nation(al team). Such framing ignores the systematic and institutional racism that already excluded several people of color from the opportunity to earn those positions and makes the gross overrepresentation of white people – on a team that purportedly represents the whole nation – seem fair and right. Before Phelps (and other American swimmers) dive into the Olympic pools of Sydney, Athens, Beijing, or London they are lauded as swimmers who earned their spot on an "aquatic superpower" through fair competition (Lohn, 2012b, p. 9). It is a powerful concoction of (white) American superiority and American Exceptionalism that serves as a foundation for the coverage of Phelps at the Olympics and shapes the narrative of the nation constructed through him.

Comparing Michael Phelps to Other Athletes

Phelps's emergence as an embodiment of America was a product of a carefully cultivated plan, orchestrated by him, his parents, his coach, and his representatives, that could occur only within the contexts of early 21st century Olympic sport (Phelps & Abrahamson, 2012; Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2009; Schaller, 2006). Phelps was able to compete as a professional athlete at the Olympics, enabling him to enjoy unprecedented and focused exposure during the same period that the Olympics became a widely televised event (Billings, 2008; Senn, 1999). In this section, I demonstrate how the mediated sporting contexts in early 21st century America allowed for implicit and explicit favorable comparison of Phelps with other athletes and employed the ideological processes of white cultural nationalism to construct Phelps as the preferred American (sporting) body.

Michael Phelps is positioned as aspirational and inspirational by the media. First, they construct him as a typical or normal teenager. They then utilize aspects of his biography in order to distance him from any perceived privilege gained by his whiteness or his masculinity, which further works to make him relatable and ordinary. Thirdly, journalists use both explicit and implicit comparisons to other athletes in their discursive construction of Phelps as representative of the nation. He is compared to a range of athletes from past and present, and from a range of sports. The most potent comparisons are to the "'contemporary professional athlete' who is almost exclusively portrayed as a black man…as child-like, not invested in family values, prone to criminality, greedy, self-interested, hampered by an over-inflated sense of entitlement, and as not having deserved/earned his wealth and high social status" (Kusz, 2007a, p. 170). Michael Phelps

is repeatedly constructed as the polar opposite of these contemporary professional athletes: a hardworking, humble, every-man positioned as an ideal representative and embodiment of America, so much so that one journalist described him as having a "boy next door persona and a regimen of grueling multiple-event training" (Zinser, 2004i, p. D1).

Making Michael Phelps inspirational is part of the project of white cultural nationalism. It is achieved through the "forwarding of a White male, who is said to have an 'average,' everyman quality, as the quintessential embodiment of America" (Kusz 2007b, p. 79). Michael Phelps's young, white swimming body is rendered as average when out of the water and as a physical manifestation of traditional American values through his earned achievements when in the water. The anecdotes from Phelps's biography that journalists select (his parents' divorce and his being raised by a single mother, his being bullied, his ADHD, etc.) downplay his privilege by further constructing him as an everyman.

Michael Phelps's family values are prominent throughout his Olympic years. His parents divorced when he was young, but rather than being portrayed as from a broken home, his two older sisters, Whitney and Hilary, are depicted as helpers to his mother when it came to raising him (Casey, 2008c; Crouse, 2008h; Michaelis, 2004d, 2004g). The divorce was difficult for Michael, but his mother and sisters pulled together to create a good home environment. While his relationship with his father is later described as strained, his father was prominent in his early childhood and was an important part of Michael's early swimming career. Furthermore, his coach, Bob Bowman, and the demanding sport of swimming provided any necessary masculinizing Michael needed

due to his living in a house with three women.

Michael's youth offered other difficulties and the two most commonly represented were his dealings with bullies and his ADHD (Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder). While bullying and ADHD are serious social issues that affect hundreds of thousands of children and adolescents every day, for Michael Phelps these issues are considered personal troubles best handled through the power of individual agency. He internalized his bullies' torments and used them as fuel for his competitive spirit and he decided that ADHD medication was an unnecessary crutch so he unilaterally decided to quit it (Jenkins, 2008; Layden, 2004a; Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009; Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2012; Sokolove, 2004). While these actions could be seen as unhealthy or even self-damaging, the media uses them to paint Phelps as ordinary because he too faces hardships and adversity, and extraordinary in that he chooses to overcome these hardships through individual action.

Kusz (2007a) draws similar conclusions when analyzing media coverage of Lance Armstrong. A multiple winner of the Tour de France in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Armstrong was also famously known as a cancer survivor. Kusz (2007a) notes that Armstrong was rarely portrayed as a victim, and that the portrayal of him as a survivor helped to disavow his privilege. Furthermore, through the use of "rhetoric like overcoming 'obstacles' and 'adversity' (instead of 'social barriers' or 'systemic inequalities') the discourse of survivors is able to *universalize and individualize* struggle…[it] promotes the idea that every person regardless of race, class, or gender faces obstacles and adversities in one's life" (Kusz, 2007a, p. 155; emphasis added). Lance Armstrong's cancer and Phelps's youthful difficulties were similarly rhetorically

framed. These similar frames made their respective successes a product of their individual will and discursively erased systemic inequalities through universalized language of adversity.

Armstrong was not the only American athlete to whom Michael Phelps was compared. Unsurprisingly, Michael Phelps was most often compared to Mark Spitz. Before Phelps, Spitz was arguably the most famous American swimmer since Esther Williams after he won seven gold medals at the 1972 Munich Olympics. Phelps's team (agents, coach, and mom) assumed that Spitz's record was a cultural touchstone to be taken advantage of when re-signing a sponsorship deal with Speedo in late 2003, and Speedo agreed to offer Phelps a $1,000,000 bonus if he could tie or break Spitz's record (Layden, 2004a; Lohn, 2004b; Sokolove, 2004). They were right. News of the bonus did drive interest, and Phelps was linked to Mark Spitz in many 2004 Olympics stories (Anderson, 2004; Cazeneuve, Kennedy, & Bechdel, 2004; Layden, 2004a, 2004b; Litsky, 2004; Lohn, 2004b; Michaelis, 2004c, 2004f; Whitten, 2004b; Zinser, 2004f, 2004g, 2004h, 2004j)[38].

Several stories framed his attempt as a "quest" (Carey, 2004; Litsky, 2004; Park, 2004; Ruane, 2004a; Whitten, 2004b). Journalists wrote of this attempt as a very difficult, but laudable, undertaking (Gordon, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; Layden, 2004a). Some observed that Phelps's 2004 attempt was just too different from Spitz's accomplishment because the (swimming) world had changed much in the 32 years since Munich (Layden, 2004a, 2004b; Sokolove, 2004; Whitten, 2004a, 2004b). Others argued that the rest of the world was too good, that Phelps was not ready to win yet. When Spitz swam, the United

[38] Phelps was linked to Spitz in stories about the subsequent Olympics too (Casey, 2008a; Crouse, 2008e).

States was so dominant he was all but guaranteed three relay gold medals, and Spitz held the world record in all four of his individual events prior to Munich. Half of Phelps's Athens races were events in which he was not the favorite for the gold medal. The United States (men's swim team) entered Athens as underdogs in two of the relays, and, while Phelps himself did hold the world record in three of his events, he was racing against current world record holders in two events, the 100-meter butterfly and 200-meter freestyle[39].

These stories could have positioned Phelps as cocky or arrogant for announcing his attempt to tie (or break) a hallowed record without being the odds-on favorite in all, or even most, of his events. They could have also served as a reminder of the challenges facing American swimming, given the rising levels of swimming greats across the globe (which served as a metaphor for the challenges facing the American nation, post-9/11). Instead, Phelps's own celebration of the values of competition and his embrace of the challenge was used to evoke and celebrate traditional, mythic American values of American men facing obstacles head on and rising to challenges (Sokolove, 2004; Whitten, 2004b).

Swimming journalist John Lohn (2004a) pointed out that the example Phelps was setting was especially poignant in 2004, when the United States was in the midst of fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and was still reeling from the 9/11 attacks. Phelps neither beat nor tied Spitz's record of seven gold medals but his six gold and two bronze medals made him the most decorated Olympian at the Athens games. Phelps's hometown

[39] The 200-meter freestyle was especially challenging, as it was his worst event and he was swimming against one of the fastest fields in the world -- many sources called it the "race of the century" because of the field's depth of quality (Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009; Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2012).

of Baltimore publicly celebrated his eight-medal haul and a local politician proclaimed to the crowd that Phelps "embodies the hope and promise that sprang from the nation's response to that day" (Tucker, 2004, p. C1). The constant invocation of Spitz served as a subtle reminder of the enduring exceptionalism of Americans, embodied by Phelps.

Two other oft-invoked athletes were golfer Tiger Woods and basketball great Michael Jordan. Bob Costas references these frequent comparisons in his 2008 foreword in *Beneath the Surface* (Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2012). While admitting that the three athletes were all supremely talented, Costas states that Phelps is similar to Jordan and Woods in other ways, too: "like the esteemed pair, [Phelps] wins so often because he understands that while talent is huge, hard work takes it to other levels. And also because, like Jordan and Woods, he loves nothing more than competing, and hates nothing more than losing" (Phelps & Abrahamson, 2012, p. xviii). And, just like that, the most popular sportscaster in America links Phelps's success to two of America's most dominant and recognizable athletes through their physical talent, their willingness to maximize that talent through hard work, and their love of competition and hatred for losing.

Jordan and Woods were also models for Phelps in his efforts "to grow the sport of swimming" (Crouse, 2008i; Schaller, 2006). Their positioning as models for the 21st century American aquatic hero is a clear reference to popularly imagined ideas that both Woods and Jordan "transcended their own sports," a marketing euphemism meaning that both were seen as men of color who could be "sold" to white audiences. Michael Jordan, especially, was described as someone who had "transcended race" (meaning "blackness") in generating appeal from mainstream (meaning "white") America (Andrews, 1996; Leonard, 2012; McDonald, 1996).

References to these two athletes of color also perpetuate the notion of Phelps as being representative of a 21st century America, a colorblind America rooted in meritocracy. Accounts of both Woods's and Jordan's dominance in their respective sports and in sponsorship deals were often deployed to demonstrate that the US is a multicultural meritocracy where any individual can achieve regardless of race or ethnicity (McDonald & Andrews, 2001; Cole & Andrews, 2001; Leonard, 2012). Successful individual athletes such as Woods and Jordan are particularly ideologically useful in a colorblind, post-racial, and post-9/11 America where Americans were called to "rise above petty differences like race" (Kusz, 2007a, p. 155). Connecting Phelps's success to the same characteristics celebrated in Woods and Jordan furthers the notion that success is open to any American – and it is achieved through individual will, hard work, and dedication.

Representing Post-9/11 America: Phelps and the 2004 Dream Team

Phelps was favorably likened to fellow American sport stars Jordan, Woods, and Spitz for his potential commercial appeal, his sporting achievements, his competitive spirit, and his dominance on the global stage while wearing the Red, White, and Blue. However, other athletes to whom he was compared helped to define Phelps as the ideal American (sporting) body by serving as his contrast. Many of these athletes were his Olympic contemporaries at Athens but they were rarely explicitly referenced in the articles about Phelps. More often than not, however, they were implicitly present in many of the articles as the aforementioned "demonized contemporary black athletes" (Kusz, 2007a, p. 140). Swimming journalist Phillip Whitten (2004b) makes the implicit comparison explicit in praising Phelps's Athens success amidst the pressure of

expectations,

> [i]n the water and out, young Michael Phelps, seemingly blissfully unaware of the burden placed upon his broad shoulders, remained himself—an extraordinary, once-in-a-generation talent who was also a respectful, hip, 19-year-old kid. A kid, just like a million other kids who was into video games, Eminem and his Escalade. He was no brash, trash-talking braggart. *It was refreshing*…What's more, America—and the rest of the world—took notice…Americans were fed up with the egocentric, spoiled brats too many of our pro athletes have become, acting as though society's rules were for everyone but them…Phelps [is] a young man who personifies everything we've always wanted in the way of role models for our kids (p.18; emphasis original).

Surely, implicit and explicit comparisons such as this present a racialized narrative of the nation in line with white cultural nationalism by pointing out what Phelps is and is not: he is a normal, regular, typical American "just like a million other kids"; he is not an egocentric, spoiled brat, professional athlete who thinks society's rules do not apply to him. This depiction – along with others – of Phelps as the embodiment of America is apart of a longstanding enterprise where "American national identity [is] imagined through representations of white men as individuals…who are made to signify the nation as a whole" that stretches back to the American Revolution and is particularly compelling during times of national crisis (Kusz, 2015, p. 229). White American manhood was often positioned as in crisis or as victims in post-9/11, post civil-rights, post-industrial, 21st century America (Giroux, 2003; Kusz, 2001, 2007a, 2007b), but Phelps – as representative of so-called "traditional American values" like hard work, dedication, competition – provided an opportunity to develop "an unapologetic and unwavering reassertion of American (white) manhood" that built upon and "rearticulated some of the ideologies and representational strategies used in previous forms of backlash politics" (Kusz, 2015, p. 231). Juxtaposing coverage of Phelps's success at Athens and

the "failure" of the NBA Dream Team reveals such strategies and demonstrates how Phelps is manufactured as the preferred national body. The contrast between the celebration of the white Phelps (Tucker, 2004) and the national shame of the black basketball players (Hack, 2004c; Robbins, 2004b; Roberts, 2004) idealizes America as White.

Phelps was a hero in his hometown (Rosewater, 2004; Ruane, 2004b; Tucker, 2004) and he followed his eight-medal performance in Athens with a cross-country "Swim with the Stars" tour with fellow gold medalists Ian Crocker and Lenny Krayzelberg (Michaelis, 2004i; "Phelps Will Take Dip in the Mickey Mouse Pool," 2004). Phelps's medal haul was impressive and important to his status, but he was also lauded for his act of sportsmanship on the final day. Having already swam in the preliminary heats of the 4x100 medley relay (and therefore being guaranteed whatever medal the American team earned in the finals), Phelps gave up his butterfly relay spot to Ian Crocker so Crocker would have a chance to win his own gold medal at Athens (Anderson, 2004; Michaelis, 2004h; Zinser, 2004i; "Summing Up Day 17," 2004). He called it an easy decision for a respected teammate and friend (Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009; Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2012), but the media praised him for his display of generosity and sportsmanship.

While Phelps was becoming an American model for his deeds in and out of the Olympic pool, the Dream Team's poor performance in Athens occurred during a broader context of demonizing black athletes. In the late 1990s into the 2000s, black athletes had been subjected to much negative scrutiny resulting in "the image of the black athlete [being] tarnished" and black athlete being equated with black criminality (Cunningham,

2009, p. 40; see also Boyd, 1997, 2003; Leonard, 2006, 2012). Examples include Barry Bonds's alleged PED-usage while breaking Mark McGwire's single-season home run record in 2001 and then eclipsing Hank Aaron's career home run record in 2007; Sydney Olympic star Marion Jones's alleged PED-use and subsequent perjury conviction; the tattoo-covered, cornrow-sporting (and 2004 Dream Teamer) Allen Iverson was at the height of his NBA success; Baltimore Ravens' Ray Lewis won the 2001 Super Bowl MVP less than one year after being indicted for murder; NFL wide receivers like Randy Moss, Chad Johnson, Terrell Owens, and Steve Smith grabbed headlines for their "elaborate touchdown celebrations" (Cunningham, 2009, p. 39); Terrell Owens further incited attention with controversial – but not criminal – public acts like criticizing teammates, holding out for a better contract, and taking part in a 2004 Monday Night Football sexually suggestive promotion skit that paired him with blonde white actress Nicolette Sheridan; Baltimore Ravens' running back Jamal Lewis was convicted as part of a drug trafficking ring; in 2005, over a dozen, mostly black, players from the Minnesota Vikings were implicated in a sex scandal involving drinking and prostitution on rented houseboats on suburban Lake Minnetonka, Minnesota; and Michael Vick was implicated and then plead guilty to being a part of an illegal underground dogfighting ring in 2007.

These stories, which were among the most popular sports stories in America during this time (because they?), often conflated black athletes and criminality. However, the coverage of the Palace Brawl in November 2004 might be the culmination of the criminalization of contemporary black athletes. David Leonard has written extensively about this event, and he calls the media coverage of the brawl a reflection of the

"importance of basketball [and professional sport] as a cultural site of conversations regarding race, class, American values, and national identity" (2006, p. 158). Leonard further contextualizes the cultural saliency of the Palace Brawl, arguing that "the 10 to 15 years prior to the Palace Brawl had been defined by the fantasy of a post-racial United States characterized by the colorblindness evident in the popularity of a racially transcendent Michael Jordan," but, in the post-Brawl coverage, "race resurfaced and all of the corresponding, ideologies, frames, narratives, and requirements of disciplinary punishment therefore became both necessary and justifiable" (2012, p. 182). While no 2004 Dream Team members were involved in the Palace Brawl, the linkages between these dominant perceptions of the NBA and the "failed" Dream Team were strong – because NBA executives and coaches had a prominent role in selecting the team and the roster was made up entirely of NBA players. In effect, the coverage of the Palace Brawl indicated that the NBA was in crisis, and the humiliations of Athens were a data point used to support this idea.

The coverage situated the incidents of the Palace Brawl within a broader context of misbehavior of (black) NBA players and these perceived misdeeds were attributed to hip-hop or street culture (Araton, 2005; Boyd, 2003; Cunningham, 2009; Leonard, 2006; 2012; McDonald & Toglia, 2010). Articulations of hip-hop, sport, and misbehavior worked within broader racial ideologies that linked blackness to criminality, and the NBA executive offices feared that these linkages would alienate a white audience. As a result, the league offices felt that it needed to respond in order to keep a white audience. One of their responses was an institution of a dress code outlawing so-called "hip-hop" clothing (Leonard 2012; McDonald & Toglia, 2010). Leonard (2012) summarizes the

league position thusly,

> [i]n the aftermath of the Palace Brawl, the failures of the 2004 Olympic basketball squad, the sexual assault allegations against Kobe Bryant, the arrest of Allen Iverson, and the overall perception that the NBA was being overrun by 'criminals,' gangstas, and those otherwise prone to 'bad behavior'…David Stern announced plans for a league-wide dress code in October 2005 (p. 129).

The dress code restricted players to "'business casual attire' when 'engaging in team or league business'" (McDonald & Toglia, 2010, p. 970) and explicitly prohibited certain articles of clothing often related to hip-hop culture[40].

This policy clearly targets hip-hop and black culture and its strict definition of what constitutes appropriate professional clothing (suits, slacks and sport coats, collared shirts, etc.) maintains white middle-class norms while marking black culture as dangerous and Other (Leonard, 2006, 2012; McDonald & Toglia, 2010). Initially this deployment of Whiteness as a way to mollify a white audience is confounding in light of the continued use of hip-hop music, style, and celebrities in many of the NBA's promotional efforts (Leonard, 2012; McDonald & Toglia, 2010). Such concurrent approaches work to de-contextualize hip-hop as a culture movement by making it about aesthetics and style, the NBA "promot[es]…urban styles and expressions as 'cool,' exotic and edgy, styles that are both devoid of social commentary and banished from the game's sidelines" (McDonald & Toglia, 2010, p. 980) and contains and commodifies Blackness for the benefit of white corporate interests. Ironically, at this same moment that hip-hop culture was being scapegoated in the NBA, Michael Phelps's happy consumption of hip-

[40] Clothing items, like sleeveless shirts, shorts, t-shirts, or non-approved or non-event-appropriate sports apparel were not allowed at team functions. The policy also banned headwear, sunglasses indoors, and headphones or chains (Leonard, 2012; McDonald and Toglia, 2010). Leonard (2012) also points out that bars and nightclubs across the country were instituting similar dress code policies targeting this style of clothing.

hop music is used to present him as an ordinary American (Layden, 2004a; Sokolove, 2004; Whitten, 2004b).

The dress code was not the only corrective measure taken by the NBA. Because hip-hop culture was tied to youth street culture, the players were seen as young or immature. As such, many sports journalists and commentators attributed the players' perceived immaturity to their lack of formal education. NBA Commissioner David Stern capitalized on the post-Brawl moment and shoehorned an age limit of 19 (and at least one year after high school graduation) into the 2005 collectively bargained agreement (Araton, 2005; Leonard, 2006, 2012). Stern, and others, defended this rule by arguing that even one year of college will help young black men learn from and mature under (mostly white) coaches. These young black men -- who were perceived to have been raised by single mothers and the Streets with no positive male role models – would greatly benefit any time spent on a college campus, and it was the NBA's duty to keep young black men from making the mistake of coming to the NBA too early and setting themselves up for failure (Araton, 2005; Leonard, 2006, 2012). Of course, this approach and rationale smacks of the same Whiteness fundamental to the NBA dress code – even if it does not fit the actual facts.

The 2004 men's Olympic basketball team was entirely made up of NBA players[41] averaging just over 23 years in age, making them one of the youngest teams in the tournament (Associated Press, 2004). Two of the teams stars, LeBron James, 19, and Carmelo Anthony, 20, were nearly the same age as the nineteen-year-old Michael Phelps.

[41] The lone exception was center Emeka Okafor, who had been drafted by the NBA's Charlotte Bobcats earlier in 2004 but he had not yet played a game in the NBA at the time of the Olympics.

Phelps's youth was highlighted as a sign of his vitality and potential, but also used as a way to make him relatable and marketable (Layden, 2004a; Sokolove, 2004; Tucker, 2004). However, the Dream Teamers' youth was taken as an indicator that the "eager rookies" needed to learn how to play basketball properly (Powell, 2004, p. SP1). According to the media portrayals, many of these young stars were immature and too used to being the focal points of their teams. As such, they struggled to learn and play a team game involving ball movement, strong shooting, and good defense (Hack, 2004a; Powell, 2004; Rhoden, 2004a; Robbins, 2004a). Allowing that the team was young, Olympic (and Philadelphia 76ers) coach Larry Brown and NBA Commissioner David Stern each argued that these players were the future of the NBA and the USA Olympic team and they would learn valuable lessons through the experience (Associated Press, 2004; Hack, 2004c; Rhoden, 2004a).

Even articles that seemingly praise the team fall into the broader narrative of framing the Dream Teamers (and young NBAers) as coddled, spoiled, or lazy. In this recap of the team's medal round victory over Spain, Bill Rhoden (2004b) praises the players for finally "remov[ing] their million-dollar masks" and choosing to "play basketball the way they played before they got rich: hard-edged and desperate" (p. D7). For Rhoden, the team was indifferent and unmotivated early in the tournament, but "with [their] back against the wall," they responded aggressively and "took the Spaniards on a tour of the inner-city United States" through their hard-nosed play (*Ibid.*). The players, who were earlier described as an embarrassment to their country, are now finally motivated to win and they "revert[ed] to street ball" of their desperate youth (*Ibid.*).

Not only is Rhoden (2004b) trafficking in notions of natural black athleticism

with casual assertions that the players can turn their athleticism on or off at will, he is also essentializing the black American experience and reinforcing stereotypes of hip-hop culture and the Street. Furthermore, his approach reifies ideologies of meritocracy; he celebrates the "fact" that the players became millionaires through hard-edged, desperate play – play that made them successful, but also play that signifies hard work and effort, presumably the qualities needed to succeed in American meritocracy and the same qualities that individual failures lack. The team was literally called a "failure" (Kepner, 2004, p. D5) and was portrayed as an embarrassment to the nation, the American sport of basketball, and the National Basketball Association (Hack, 2004a, 2004c; Roberts, 2004; Robbins, 2004b).

Media coverage of Phelps and the Dream Teamers constructed the men as opposing representatives of America. Phelps embodied all that is right and good in America and the Dream Teamers represented the feared post-9/11 erosion of these good qualities. This framing began with the way each national team was selected. Members of the basketball team did not have to earn their spot: they were chosen by a committee. Conversely, Phelps and his teammates earned their berths on the American Olympic swimming team. Their performances at the Trials merited their membership on the team, and, therefore, their representation of the nation.

The NBA players were depicted as disinterested in competing for America on the global stage while Michael Phelps embraced the challenge of attempting to break Mark Spitz's record[42]. Finally, and maybe most importantly, Phelps was a winner and a good

[42] The NBA players who opted out of the Athens games (due to injury, other commitments, or safety fears) were surely framed in this light, but so were the players who – after a long NBA season and postseason –

sport because his eight medals were the most by an individual Olympian in Athens and he gave a teammate a chance to win his own gold by sacrificing his own spot in the finals of the medley relay. The bronze-medal winning 2004 Dream Team, however, was the first American men's team since 1988 to fail to win gold and the first group of NBAers to lose any game during Olympic competition[43]. Overall, coverage of the Dream Team's "failures" in Athens adheres to the bounds of the broader demonizing narratives of black athletes that constituted the new racism of the 21st century (Leonard & King, 2011).

White Cultural Nationalism: Membership Has Its Privileges

Thus far my analysis has demonstrated how Phelps's white swimming body was manufactured as the ideal imagined representative body of America. One incident – after the 2004 Olympics – demonstrates the privileges of Whiteness. Late on Thursday, November 4th, the 19-year-old Phelps failed to stop at a stop sign and the Maryland state trooper who pulled him over found him to have been driving while under the influence of alcohol (Brennan, 2004a, 2004b; Michaelis, 2004j, 2004k; Rich, 2004). While Phelps was arrested for allegedly committing actual criminal offenses, he was given the benefit of the doubt often afforded to white Americans: he was allowed to speak for himself and he was not solely defined by this one act. While the coverage was not as widespread as his later (criminal) indiscretions would be – the 2008 photograph of him smoking marijuana or the 2014 arrest for a second DUI – the coverage consistently condemned the criminal act and called for caution and prudence in treatment of the young American

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accepted the invitation to give up their offseason and play in Athens. Phelps was praised for racing in the 200-meter freestyle, an event where he was the decided underdog, and for his good sportsmanship in giving his spot in the finals of the medley relay to countryman and competitor Ian Crocker.

[43] They became only the third American men's basketball team to not win gold since 1936, joining the 1972 (silver) and 1988 (bronze) teams.

swimming star. From the outset, he was portrayed as appropriately humble and repentant.

For his part, Phelps called the criminal offense of drinking and driving a "mistake" and apologized to his young fans (Brennan, 2004a; Michaelis, 2004k; Rich, 2004). Articles with headlines of "Phelps regrets letting down kids" (Brennan, 2004a) and "Olympian Phelps Gets Probation; Swimmer Admits to Driving While Impaired in Md." (Rich, 2004) position Phelps as a failed (but redeemable) role model to America's youth. Phelps pled guilty and agreed to speak to area youth about his mistake as part of his probation. He claimed to have "learned from this mistake" (Rich, 2004, p. B1; Michaelis, 2004k, p. 1c) and "he hopes he still can be a role model" (Brennan, 2004a, p. 2C). His response allowed for him to contradict the idea of him as a failed role model. To many, Phelps demonstrated how a role model should act: he took responsibility for his actions and tried to teach others through his "mistake."

These articles gave Phelps the benefit of the doubt that he could learn a lesson from this mistake. Phelps's choice to give up his relay spot at the Athens Olympics was used to indicate his good character and as proof that he was the kind of person who will learn from his mistakes (Michaelis, 2004k; see Anderson, 2004). But, they also cite Phelps's youth as an explanation for his behavior: he was scared to lose his newfound reputation (Michaelis, 2004k) and it took him some time to realize the seriousness of his mistake (Brennan, 2004a; Michaelis, 2004j; Rich, 2004) but he will not do it again. Giving Phelps the benefit of the doubt as a young man who simply made a mistake exemplifies the interconnections between race and nationalism, and the privileges of White Americans. He was a national hero, the "swimming sensation who was the most celebrated U.S. athlete at the Summer Games in Athens" (Rich, 2004, p. B1), and he was

a young white man who, when arrested by the Maryland sate trooper, was described as "fully cooperative" (Michaelis, 2004j, p. 1C).

In 2004, the media treated the 19-year-old Phelps with more respect and dignity after he committed a crime than they treated the young black men (some of whom were Phelps's age) on the Dream Team, whose only offense was losing three basketball games. Though the articles condemned his actions, Phelps was never called a failure or an embarrassment. Importantly, he was not defined by his actions, either; the DUI was something that he did, not something that he was. Phelps's voice was heard and he was allowed to explain his interpretation of what happened, and he was given space to apologize and redeem himself. This treatment is a result of his Olympic stardom, his rising celebrity status, and his constructed status as an innocent, naïve, and young white man in line with the project of white cultural nationalism.

Conclusion

The Olympics have been sites for exploring the connections between sport and nationalism, but swimming and swimmers have been too often ignored as sites for this exploration. By winning close to one-third of all swimming medals awarded since 1896, the United States has dominated the sport at its highest levels. While scholars have critically examined the racial exclusionary past of American swimming spaces (Wiltse, 2007, 2014) and its present-day position as a site for reproducing class and race privileges (DeLuca, 2013), the overwhelming whiteness of the American national team (Crouse, 2012b), when combined with its international dominance, makes the sport of swimming an important site for exploring the construction of a racialized American national identity

Over the course of twelve years and four Olympic games, Michael Phelps became a record-breaking athlete and an American sporting star. He became the youngest man to swim for the American Olympic team in nearly seven decades when he qualified for the Sydney Olympics as a fifteen-year-old high school student from Baltimore. His eighteen gold, and twenty-two total, medals in Athens, Beijing, and London elevated him to national hero during a moment of national crisis. Phelps's unprecedented success in the individual sport of swimming tapped into the already in process project of white cultural nationalism, which is rooted in the conservative backlash to the civil-rights era gains made by women, people of color, and other historically marginalized and disenfranchised people (Kusz, 2001, 2007a, 2007b). The responses to 9/11 breathed life back into the processes of white cultural nationalism, helping to re-racialize America as a white nation and erase historic systems of oppression by utilizing identity politics to help re-secure white men as the obvious representative of the nation. Representations of Michael Phelps situate him firmly within white cultural nationalism, and further conflate Whiteness and American into the 21st century.

While Phelps rose to cultural salience, American prestige and status was seen as under attack in and out of the sporting world. The United States waged unpopular, and increasingly intractable, wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq, and many American sporting stars were embroiled in doping scandals. Media coverage of professional black athletes during this time often equated blackness, hip-hop, and criminality. The longstanding racial ideology linking blackness to athleticism (Carrington, 2010; Wiggins, 2014) and blackness to criminality often equated black athletes with criminality in the media (Cunningham, 2009; Leonard, 2012; Kusz, 2011).

During this time of national crisis (Giroux, 2003; Silk, 2012; Kusz, 2007a, 2015), Michael Phelps emerges on the global sporting scene. He participated in an individual sport and his white swimming body, often literally wrapped in American Red, White, and Blue, raised the American flag twenty-two times, and played the national anthem eighteen times, on foreign soil. His sport is drenched in the ideology of meritocracy and privileges individual success. Its Whiteness and strong association with the Olympics' ideological construction of the pure ideal athlete (Lenskyj, 2000) allow him to serve as a corrective corollary to the problems of blackness bedeviling 21st century American professional sport.

While representations of Phelps certainly do continue the long-standing work of conflating Whiteness and American-ness, the representations of Phelps are also a part of an "ongoing cultural process of attempting to re-secure a privileged position for white masculinity in American culture at a time when its privileged status and relationship might have been destabilized but was certainly not dismantled" (Kusz, 2015, p. 228).

His white American swimming body is portrayed as the physical embodiment of the American nation through juxtaposition of Phelps and other black athletes, specifically the bronze-medal winning 2004 men's American basketball team. Media representations of Phelps help to perpetuate and extend the process of white cultural nationalism by re-centering American "traditional values" of hard-work and meritocracy onto the taken-for-granted white body of Michael Phelps and privileging individual success through descriptions of the sport of swimming. In the next chapter, I explain how the global sporting structures created an environment in which these the media constructions of Michael Phelps occur and allowed the national Olympic hero to maintain his Olympic

eligibility and become the “star of television commercials and print ads” (Tucker, 2004, p. C3).

CHAPTER 4: Endorsing Michael Phelps: Eligibility and Commodification

The Olympics have long been a commercial enterprise (Boykoff, 2013; Guttmann, 2002; Horne & Whannel, 2012; Lenskyj, 2000; Tomlinson & Whannel, 1984). Most scholars who have furthered this argument do so by pointing to the increase in television coverage for the Olympics as the main revenue stream for the IOC and its multinational corporate partners (Andrews, 1998; Billings, 2008; Horne & Whannel, 2012). Billions of people from around the globe consume sporting events on television every year, with 3.8 billion watching the London Summer Olympics alone (IOC Marketing Report, 2012). The televised Olympics consolidates splintered audiences around a sixteen day sporting spectacle where people watch their national representatives compete in a variety of sports, leading to large fees for the rights to broadcast the Games (Billings, 2008; Chappelet & Kübler-Mabbott, 2008; Horne & Whannel, 2012).

After paying hundreds of millions of dollars for the rights to broadcast the 2008 Olympics[44], American television company NBC sought to maximize American viewers by having Chinese organizers change the swimming and gymnastics event finals to morning local time so they would occur live in US primetime (Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009; Vecsey, 2008). Phelps claims that NBC chairman Dick Ebersol, knowing how integral Phelps was going to be to the Beijing broadcast, asked for Phelps's thoughts about this schedule switch in the fall of 2004. Phelps was "thrilled" because "swimming

[44] NBC Universal has owned the rights to broadcast every Summer and Winter Olympics in the United States since 2000. It extended its partnership with the IOC in 2011 by agreeing "to pay $4.38 billion for the United States rights to four Olympics from 2014 to 2022" (Sandomir, 2011, p. B13). NBC paid $2 billion for the rights to the 2010 Vancouver Games and 2012 London Games, and had paid $3.5 billion for the rights to the 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2008 Games (Sandomir, 2011).

being on primetime is everything I want for the sport" (Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009, p. 47).

The IOC and other sporting federations agreed to the unprecedented schedule change. The swimming finals were scheduled for 10am Beijing time "to satisfy the prime-time needs of the their dear friends in America" to leverage the interest in Phelps's attempt at eight gold medals to attract more viewers in the U.S. and, therefore, more advertising revenue (Vecsey, 2008, p. SP9; see also Astleford, 2008, Carter, 2008). By 2008, Phelps himself had utilized his popularity as a national swimming star to ink numerous lucrative endorsement deals with Speedo swimwear, VISA credit cards, and Omega watches, among others; he had been a sponsored professional athlete since 2001.

In this chapter, I use Michael Phelps's contradictory status as a professional swimmer who swims in the Olympics, long a bastion for amateur ideology, to explicate the roles inter/national sporting structures, such as the IOC, FINA, and USA Swimming, play in the processes of commercialization and commodification of the Olympics Games. First, I discuss the relationships between sport and commodification and compare Michael Phelps experiences as a professional swimmer to Mark Spitz's loss of eligibility the moment he sought to capitalize on his amateur performances after the 1972 Games in Munich. Next, I contextualize the governing structures of Olympic swimming[45] within the late capitalist context. Finally, I trace the eligibility rules of the national sporting federation (USA Swimming) to demonstrate how Michael Phelps's career coincides with a reformation of the meanings of eligibility that shifts away from the oppositional

[45] The International Olympic Committee (IOC); Fédération Internationale de Natation (FINA); United States Olympic Committee (USOC); and USA Swimming (under the umbrella of United States Aquatic Sports (USAS)) are the sporting bodies under whose governance Michael Phelps, and his Olympic teammates, must compete.

amateur/professional binary and towards concerns of performance-enhancing drug use and personal conduct.

Examining these rules demonstrates how definitions of eligibility have shifted over the last four decades, since Mark Spitz's historic 1972 Munich Games. Ideals of eligibility have shifted from concerns over amateurism enforced by centralized sporting bureaucracies to athletes' responsibility for self-governance that occurred during an expansion of the Olympics as televised spectacle and the rise of late capitalism. To that end, swimming eligibility exemplifies how international sport has become, as Andrews (2009) argues, "systematically colonized…by this emergent strain of late capitalism prefigured on the aggressive exploitation of culture as a pivotal source, and process, of capital accumulation [where]…virtually all aspects of the global sport infrastructure…are now driven and defined by the interrelated processes of: commercialization; exploitation; corporatization; and spectacularization" (p. 213). I argue that, in the interest of expanding their own capital accumulation, the structures of international sport "liberalized" the notions of amateurism and eligibility to include athletes who they thought would attract the most consumers. Such "liberalization" has provided space for singular athletes like Michael Phelps to participate within this process for their own economic and social benefit without fundamentally changing the structures of international sport.

Sport and Commodification

Sports are an important aspect of consumer capitalist society (Horne, 2006; Horne & Whannel, 2012; Whannel, 2009). Even before A.G. Spalding used his sport rulebooks to promote and bolster his sporting goods company in the late 19th century (Rader, 1983), sport, physical culture, leisure, and recreation had been linked with consumer capitalism

(Dyreson, 1998; Oriard, 1998; Pope, 1997; Rosenzweig, 1985; Veblen, 2007). Consumers pay to attend sporting events, or for access to watch sporting events on television. They buy sporting goods: baseball gloves, baseballs, shoes, swimsuits, goggles, or protective equipment. They display their support and fandom for particular teams and athletes through purchased goods. They pay to be members of clubs that enable them to compete in organized sports, and they pay for other means to consume sport, such as magazines, internet sites, or subscription radio programs. Ours is a consumer society where "people live their lives in relation to the consumer objects around them" and construct meanings and identities through consumption (Horne, 2006, p. 72).

The notion of sporting celebrity arose out of our consumer society (Andrews & Jackson, 2001b; Birrell & McDonald, 2000; Ifekwunige, 2009; Whannel, 2009). The global popularity of sport, along with the "apparent universality of sports performance," uniquely situates sporting celebrities as ideal mediated texts onto which "companies…tag the personality of a brand" (Horne, 2006, p. 80, 81). Sporting celebrities, like Peyton Manning, Serena Williams, or David Beckham, emerge from the proliferation of sporting media, where sport stars become famous for their actions on and off the field through 'round-the-clock coverage. As Whannel (2009) notes, the "convergence of sport stardom and the celebrity culture has fostered an objectification of the body and a commodification of the self" (p. 77). Sporting celebrities thus become synonymous with the company by selling their personality to the company and becoming a public proponent of that company – and, in this way, they commodify themselves.

Commodities are integral to capitalism (Horne, 2006; Horne & Whannel, 2012; Marx, 1994). At its most basic and simplistic level, a commodity is any thing that can be bought or sold, "an external object…which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind" (Marx, 1994, p. 220). Marx (1994) complicates this simple definition by reminding us that the meanings of a commodity are embedded through social relations during the process of exchange. The conditions under which these meanings are created are both economic and cultural (Hall, 1986; Whannel, 2009). Sport is a useful site for "explicat[ing] the complex" cultural processes and social structures that create these conditions (Whannel, 2009, p. 81).

Commodifications of self are complex processes that are a part of the broader circuit of capitalism (Du Gay, et al., 1997; Whannel, 2009). They are made even more complex in the dual role inherent in (sporting) celebrity, where they are "both products (the preponderance of celebrity-driven media and commodities) and processes (the pre-eminence of celebrity endorsement) within the dominant, symbolically propelled, regime of capital accumulation underpinning the late-capitalist economy" (Andrews & Jackson, 2001b, p. 4). Furthermore, sporting celebrities are particularly appealing endorsers for corporations due to the assumed legitimacy of sport, where "the seeming visceral, dramatic immediacy of the sport practice provides sport celebrity with an important veneer of authenticity, that sets him or her apart from celebrities drawn from other, more explicitly manufactured, cultural realms" (Andrews & Jackson, 2001b, p. 8; see Horne, 2006, p. 79-83).

Michael Phelps became a professional swimmer – and a commodity – by signing an endorsement deal with Speedo in the fall of 2001, shortly after his first World

Championship gold medal and just over a year after becoming the youngest man in 68 years to make the American Olympic swimming team (McMullen, 2006; Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009; Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2012). In early 2004, Phelps was awarded the 2003 Sullivan Award by the Amateur Athletic Union. The irony of a professional swimmer winning the award "honor[ing] the outstanding amateur athlete in the United States" (aausullivan.org) illustrates the ideologies that construct Olympic-centric sports as pure and ideal and then obscure the (late) capitalist and/or neoliberal economic and social policies at the root of the late 20th and early 21st century Olympic Games (Boykoff, 2013; Kidd, 1997; Lenskyj, 2000). Examining the structures of elite swimming unpacks this irony and shows how shifting notions of eligibility allow for the neoliberal practice of commodification of self that places the individual as primary and the "free" market as the site for determining (and earning) one's worth, "the ability, and indeed the perceived requirement, of individuals to define themselves within and through their forays into the consumer marketplace" as buyers, sellers, or both (Silk & Andrews, 2012, p. 4).

After making the Olympic team in 2000 and setting his first world record in 2001, Michael Phelps really emerged as a monumental talent after an historic summer of swimming in 2003. That summer he became the first man to set five individual world records in one meet when he won four gold and two silver medals at the 2003 FINA World Championships. Then, weeks later, at the 2003 U.S. Nationals, he became the first man to win five national titles when he set his eighth world record of the year[46] to win the 200-meter individual medley, and then won his secondary events: the 200-meter

[46] He set two world records at earlier meets in the year: in the 400-meter individual medley at the Duel in the Pool against Australia in Indianapolis that April and in the 200-meter individual medley in Santa Clara, CA at the beginning of the summer (Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2012).

backstroke, 100-meter freestyle, 200-meter freestyle, and 400-meter freestyle (Lohn, 2010; Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2012). On the heels of this superb swimming, Phelps instructed his agent, Peter Carlisle, to negotiate an extension of his contract with main sponsor Speedo (McMullen, 2006; Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009; Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2012).

In an effort to gain attention for Phelps and the sport of swimming, Carlisle pushed for a splashy deal that would – according to Carlisle – "make [Phelps] relevant outside of swimming" (McMullen, 2006, p. 75). Inspired by reality television, Carlisle proposed a $1,000,000 bonus if Phelps matched or broke Spitz's seven gold medal performance at either Athens 2004 or Beijing 2008 (Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009; McMullen, 2006). The deal generated the desired marketing "buzz" for Phelps and Speedo leading up to Athens, and it linked Phelps and Speedo to Spitz's historic feat in 1972 (McMullen, 2006). Understandably, Spitz and Phelps were linked in many of the media stories before, during, and after both the Athens and Beijing Games (see previous chapter). After all, it was Spitz's records for most gold medals in a single Games and an Olympic career[47] that Phelps aimed for in 2004 and then broke in 2008. Spitz was also, arguably, the last American swimmer to achieve cultural import beyond the Olympic fortnight until Phelps's rise to prominence.

Phelps vs. Spitz: Professional Olympian vs. Amateur Olympian

Comparisons between Spitz and Phelps at the athletic level are obvious, but they have even deeper resonances when considering the shifting definitions of amateurism and professionalism, and the roles sporting structures play in these shifts. While the press

[47] He shared the record of nine career gold medals with track stars Carl Lewis (USA) and Paavo Nurmi (FIN), and Soviet gymnast Larisa Latynina, whose career total medal record Phelps broke in 2012.

coverage of Phelps for the $1,000,000 bonus did generate attention for Phelps and swimming (and even Mark Spitz), it also calls attention to the differences in their swimming careers – and the way that Olympic sport has changed over the years. After failing to meet his own expectations at the 1968 Olympics when he won only two relay gold medals, Spitz went on to Indiana University to swim for legendary coach James "Doc" Counsilman. Mark Spitz's intense, coach-led training might have marked him ineligible for amateur competition in a different era[48] yet Spitz maintained his amateur status entering the 1972 Munich Games, where he won a record seven gold medals in seven races.

He immediately capitalized on his seven gold medals in Munich by hiring an agent, a marketing team, and participating in a photo shoot just days after his final event (Lydon, 1973; McMullen, 2006). The photo session resulted in the iconic photo of Spitz in his a Stars and Stripes Speedo suit with all seven gold medals hanging from his neck. The poster of this image sold over one million copies and allowed Spitz to earn a "quick $1 million off his Olympic fame," effectively ending his competitive swimming career at the age of 23 (McMullen, 2006, p. 61)[49].

Spitz's eligibility to swim at the international levels ended as result of his lucrative photo session, and he was also almost a victim of amateur policing at Munich

[48] Olympic meanings of amateurism were never entirely fixed (Llewellyn & Gleaves, 2014a, 2014b). For instance, historian Mark Dyreson (1998) reports tensions between the USA and British Olympic teams during the 1908 London Olympics that partly revolved around the USA athletics' participants perceived ignorance of the "social codes" of amateur sports that discouraged regimented training "in a 'scientific' fashion…they [British athletes] wanted to win as desperately as their American counterparts, but they could not train efficiently or specialize" (p. 145). These social codes were cinematically represented in *Chariots of Fire* (1981), where eventual 1924 Olympic champion Harold Abrahams controversially hired a professional coach, Sam Mussabini.

[49] Phelps announced his $1,000,000 bonus in the fall before he even qualified for his second Olympics (Heath, 2003; Litsky, 2003) and there were no questions about his Olympic eligibility.

during his legendary swimming performance. In a story relayed in both McMullen's biography of Phelps (2006), and Phelps's autobiography, *No Limits* (2009), Spitz waved to the crowd after the awards ceremony for his 200-meter freestyle victory, his third gold medal of the Games. Unfortunately, he was holding a pair of old tennis shoes in his waving hand. He was forced to appear in front of the IOC and its President, Avery Brundage, to explain his actions: *was this a covert act of marketing?* Spitz was able to convince Brundage that he was not endorsing any product – which would violate the IOC interpretation of amateurism – and he was able to return to his swimming in Munich without missing an event (McMullen, 2006; Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009).

While Phelps's (auto)biographies draw comparisons between the two swimming stars, some journalists (Layden, 2004a; Sokolove, 2004), and Phelps himself, were careful to draw distinctions between their experiences (McMullen, 2006; Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009). Phelps famously declared multiple times that he never wanted to be the next Mark Spitz, just "the first Michael Phelps" (Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009, p. 3; cf. Farred, 2012). Grant Farred (2012) argues that Phelps's own distancing of himself from Spitz was evidence that Phelps is "the face of extreme individuality" (p. 122). Whereas Farred (2012) uses Phelps's response to the comparisons between himself and Spitz as an "insight into the complex intersection between sport and the discourse of neoliberalism" (p. 111), I see it as a point of entry for examining how the structured notions of professionalism, amateurism, and eligibility shift over time, thus offering a site to explore meanings of sporting participation within the contexts of late capitalism.

Amateurism, Commercialization, and the Olympics

In 1972, Mark Spitz was almost expelled from the Games for waving his old tennis shoes at fans, and then was effectively forced into retirement after choosing to capitalize on his own swimming success at 23. By 2004, at the age of 19, Michael Phelps was already a well-compensated professional athlete who used the media attention of the Olympics to leverage larger compensation for himself. At the age of 23 – when Spitz retired – Phelps competed in Beijing, his third Olympics, and reached new heights in fame due to his record eight gold medals (Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009; Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2012). An examination of how Phelps was(/is) able to maintain his Olympic eligibility despite estimates that he could earn between $40 and $100 million from sponsorships directly tied to his swimming (Badenhausen, 2012; Mackey, 2012; Rosewater, 2008; Tate, 2008) will establish how ideas of amateurism, professionalism, and sport have changed in the last few decades, and how the processes of late capitalism transpire within elite sport.

The classed, gendered, and raced tensions surrounding professionalism, amateurism, commercialization, and commodification have long reverberated in Olympic sport. These tensions are never settled and were under contestation throughout the early Olympics (Llewellyn & Gleaves, 2014a, 2014b). Pierre de Coubertin privileged aristocratic European 19th century amateur ideals when he appropriated ancient Greek sporting practices in order to create the Modern Olympics and to gain support from influential English and North American sporting leaders (Guttmann, 1992; Kidd, 1984; Llewellyn & Gleaves, 2014b).

Dyreson (1998) illustrates these different ideals of amateurism through the example of the United States' athletic success at the 1912 Stockholm Olympics. While the U.S. press lauded the success as a symbol of the nation's greatness, foreign commentators "disliked American methods of financing teams, accused American athletes of being victory-programmed automatons who twisted the true meaning of sport" (Dyreson, 1998, p. 164). Still stinging from their (comparatively) poor performances at the 1908 London games and the 1912 Stockholm games, the British decried the American "professionals…[who] were not members of the leisure class" (Dyreson, 1998, p. 165).

While the US delegation argued that this was an antiquated and anti-modern understanding of sport, the British claims gained some legitimacy when the news broke that 1912 Native American Olympic star Jim Thorpe had accepted payment for playing minor league baseball a few summers prior. Perhaps as a response to British critiques, US officials stripped Thorpe of his amateur status and the IOC then took his two gold medals away. Contemporary critics claimed that Thorpe was being held to unfair standards, partially due to his race as a Native American, and further calling the ideals of amateurism into further question (Dyreson, 1998; Llewellyn & Gleaves, 2014b).

Allegations of professionalism would continue to plague American sporting stars. John Gleaves and Matt Llewellyn (2012) focus on American track sprinter Charley Paddock throughout the 1920s. In the first Olympics since World War 1, the 1920 games took place in war-ravaged Antwerp and, after his sterling performance at the 1919 Inter-Allied games, Paddock was one of the stars expected to perform in Belgium (Gleaves & Llewellyn, 2012). The Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) governed amateur athletics in the United States during Paddock's career and they would revoke an athlete's amateur status

"if [the athlete] competed alongside a known professional, derived any pecuniary benefit from their athletic talents (via prize winnings, coaching, writing, and advertisements), or if they competed in a non-AAU sanctioned [event]" (Gleaves & Llewellyn, 2012, p. 3).

Paddock's career coincided with the early growth of sporting celebrity (Andrews and Jackson, 2001b) and he challenged the AAU's authority on multiple occasions, hoping to take personal advantage of his fame and success – so much so that Gleaves and Llewellyn argue that the "AAU's major battle of the early 1920s was waged against Paddock, an athlete whose international and collegiate success had made him a popular celebrity amongst a public increasingly disillusioned with amateurism" (2012, p. 7). Paddock competed in events outside of the AAU's purview, acted in films, and wrote newspaper accounts of his and other athletes' sporting achievements. Despite numerous AAU challenges and threats throughout the decade, he maintained his eligibility due to their mutual dependency: the AAU needed the star for gate receipts and Paddock needed the AAU in order to keep racing at elite levels. Furthermore, Paddock's carefully prepared public words and deeds allowed him to maintain amateurism due to the AAU's willingness "to accommodate" (Gleaves & Llewellyn, 2012, p. 16).

Paddock's battles with the AAU are an important instance from the past that demonstrates how sporting celebrity works within the interdependencies of national and international sporting governance. Gleaves and Llewellyn (2012) claim that the organization was particularly important because of its influence on then AAU executive Avery Brundage. Elected AAU president in 1929, Brundage immediately fortified the AAU's stance on amateurism. Later as president of the IOC from 1952 until 1972, he was

known and now remembered "for his ardent defense of amateurism in the Olympic movement" (Gleaves & Llewellyn, 2012, p. 22; see Guttmann, 1984 or Senn, 1999).

Brundage was an elite athlete in the United States, even competing in the 1912 Olympics[50], and then, for decades, was a prominent member of sporting governance at the national (AAU) and international levels (IOC). He was a passionate and vocal proponent for the Olympics as a kind of secular religion that had powers to bring the world together through fair play and honest competition (Guttmann, 1984). For Brundage,

> the amateur plays for the sake of play, for the love of it, as the etymology of 'amateur' implies, while professionals have some other motive, usually materialistic. There are those who compete 'for the love of the game itself without thought of reward or payment of any kind,' and they are free men; the others are 'employees' and 'entertainers…and there is no place for them in the Olympic Games.' Professional sports are 'a branch of the entertainment business' (Guttmann, 1984, p. 116).

Brundage's long career in elite sport insured that these ideologies of amateurism – an ideology that created a clear amateur/professional binary rooted in 19th classist ideals where it was all but impossible for an athlete from the working class to gain or afford to participate as an amateur – stayed entrenched within the Olympic Movement at least until he left office in 1972 (Guttmann, 1984; Senn, 1999).

[50]He competed in both the pentathlon and the decathlon at Stockholm (Guttmann, 1984). Ironically, these were the two events Jim Thorpe won before he was stripped of his medals due to concerns of his amateur status. The IOC re-awarded Thorpe his medals posthumously in 1982, ten years after Brundage left the IOC.

Structures of Olympic Swimming

When Michael Phelps competes at the Olympic games, he competes in a heavily structured and tightly governed sporting space. While the Olympic Games and their attendant social and cultural importance are one of the most studied sporting events/practices (Girginov, 2010), few scholars have specifically examined its sprawling governing structure in the 21st century. We can look to Michael Phelps's experiences as a concrete instance of this abstraction.

At the August 2015 United States Nationals in San Antonio, Phelps competed as a member of the USA Swimming club North Baltimore Aquatic Club (NBAC). NBAC is a club member of the Maryland Swimming Local Swimming Committee (LSC), which is one LSC in the Eastern Zone, which is one of four Zones in USA Swimming, which is one of the five sport governing bodies[51] within United States Aquatic Sports, the umbrella-national federation for all aquatic sports recognized and governed by FINA. The meet was managed by USA Swimming, but under the jurisdiction of FINA. Phelps won three events, the 100- and 200-meter butterflies and the 200-meter individual medley. His times in those events were officially recognized in FINA's World Rankings, meaning that Phelps and the meet had complied with all FINA rules and regulations[52].

[51] USA Swimming, Inc.; USA Diving; United States Synchronized Swimming, Inc.; USA Water Polo, Inc.; and United States Masters Swimming, Inc. (http://usaquaticsports.org).

[52] FINA regulations include the depth of the pool, the kind of suit worn in competition, the number of officials on the pool deck, the actual mechanics of the stroke, etc. His times were the fastest times in the world in 2015, and topping the World's Rankings list in those events put Phelps onto the USA National Team. Aside from meeting general qualifications such as actively training and competing, a swimmer who has "a top 12 World Ranking in an Olympic event at FINA.org as of 8 am mountain time, September 1, 2015" is named to the 2015-2016 USA National Team and receives monthly financial assistance to help the athlete prepare for Rio 2016; the athlete must achieve the times in a "USA Swimming or FINA sanctioned meet" ("Athlete Funding," USA Swimming, 2015).

Professionalizing Amateur Sport

The Amateur Sports Act of 1978 (henceforth known as the Act) is significant to the sporting infrastructure in the United States (Hunt, 2007; Wakefield, 2007). The perceived failure by the US team (aside from Spitz) at the 1972 Munich games, especially in comparison to their Cold War adversaries, was a main impetus for the passage of the Act (Hunt, 2007; Wakefield, 2007). The Act essentially reorganized American amateur sport by creating individual national sporting federations for each sport, rather than having the sports governed by the NCAA and/or the AAU, whose contentious relationship was seen as damaging to American elite amateur sport (Wakefield, 2007). With the Act's institution, each national sporting federation was self-governing, but also responsible for a vast majority of their own funding. While Hunt (2007) allows that the Act permits athletes in minor sports to have opportunities at gaining more funding, he reiterates that the Act "frame[s] the problem as one of elite sport" and ignores the nation's majority (non-elite) amateur athletes: "while Americans are able to watch highly successful US teams at the Summer Olympics, the vast majority of their numbers have only modest opportunities to participate in athletics" (p. 808, 809). Thus, the Act facilitates an amateur sports system in the United States that privileges elite athletes' performances and where each sport is funded via public-private partnership and self-governing.

The funding changes for individual sports ordered by the Act effected a shift in meanings of amateur athletics in the United States. During this same period, the IOC was changing the meanings of amateurism. Historian Alfred Senn (1999) argues that IOC President Lord Killanin, whose 1972-1980 term immediately followed Avery Brundage's

two decade term, "supervised the liberalization of eligibility rules, preparing the way for his successor, Juan Antonio Samaranch, to 'open' the Games to professionals" (p. 156). This liberalization process began at the 1973 Olympic Congress, where proposals to eliminate the "historic references to 'amateurism'" from the rules on eligibility were recommended (Senn, 1999, p. 161), as well as proposals to allow athletes to work as sport instructors and/or receive limited financial assistance from their National Olympic Committees (NOC) and/or National sporting Federations (NF). The IOC officially adopted the Congress's proposals the following year.

The 1970s and early 1980s were precarious times for the IOC, with Denver pulling out of hosting the 1976 Winter Olympics, various political boycotts at the 1976, 1980, and 1984 Summer Olympics, Ted Turner's creation of the Goodwill Games to challenge the sporting spectacle, and the controversial awarding of the 1988 games to Seoul, South Korea (Guttmann, 2002; Senn, 1999). This period of uncertainty encouraged the IOC "to establish its own sources of income" (Senn, 1999, p. 208). Its first move was to hire a firm, International Sports, Culture and Leisure Marketing (ISL), to market the games (Chappelet & Kübler-Mabbott, 2008; Senn, 1999). The IOC and ISL recruited corporate sponsorships at varying levels of access to use of symbols and called the top level of sponsorship TOP (The Olympic Program), which allowed multinational corporations monopolistic access to the use of Olympic symbols and placement at the Games' host cities (Chappelet & Kübler-Mabbott, 2008; Horne & Whannel, 2012; Senn, 1999).

These income sources, along with the multi-million dollar American television contracts for the 1984 and 1988 Summer Games, helped to turn the IOC and the Olympic

Games into highly commercialized projects (Horne & Whannel, 2012; Senn, 1999). In a continuation of his predecessor's moves in 1973 and partly to justify and expand these revenues, Samaranch urged the IOC to further open the games to allow the "best athletes" to compete, regardless of their "professional status" (Senn, 1999). The internal politics of this decision are beyond the scope of this chapter, but the IOC developed a plan called "an 'athlete's code,' whereby the competitors simply agreed to observe their respective federations' conditions" of eligibility (Senn, 1999, p. 216)[53]. The change was made in time for professional tennis players, such as Steffi Graf, to compete at the 1988 Seoul Summer Games[54].

The underlying logic for this decision supports Horne and Whannel's (2012) assertion that the "Games are perhaps *better* understood as a television event than as a sporting one" (p. 47; emphasis original) and the best athletes (i.e., "professional athletes") are what spectators desire. Such logic mirrors the domestic Act's focus of sport as elite, and any pretense that the Olympic Games are primarily a sporting festival meant to bring the youth of the world together (Kidd, 1997) are jettisoned in favor of creating the best sporting spectacle, which the IOC thought meant allowing professional athletes to participate. This code paved the way for several athletes who were previously classified as ineligible to compete in the Olympics[55].

[53] In essence, this meant that international sporting federations would determine (Olympic) eligibility.
[54] In what may be one of the most impressive athletic feats of the 20th century, Graf completed a "Golden Slam" in 1988 by winning individual gold at Seoul and the four major professional tournaments (Australian Open, French Open, Wimbledon, and U.S. Open).
[55] Exemplified most famously by the U.S.'s "Dream Team" basketball team made up of eleven NBA All-Stars, including Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, and Larry Bird, and one collegiate player, at Samaranch's hometown 1992 Olympics and the NHL players from several nations at the Nagano Games in 1998.

Although Michael Phelps became the youngest American man to give up his NCAA swimming eligibility by signing an endorsement contract with Speedo in 2001 shortly after turning 16, he was not the first swimmer to follow this path (McMullen, 2006). Fellow North Baltimore swimmer Anita Nall became a professional when she gave up her college eligibility in 1990 at the age of fourteen by accepting sponsorship and appearance money before she had even qualified for the Olympics (Nakamura, 1994). University of Michigan swimmer and Olympic gold medalist Tom Dolan gave up his final year of swimming for the Wolverines when he signed a six-figure contract with Nike in 1996 (Brennan, 1996). Nall and Dolan were early examples of how elite swimmers could take personal advantage of the changing structures of sport in order to make money and maintain eligibility in the most important event of their sport, the Olympics.

Amateurism and Eligibility in USA Swimming

The Amateur Sports Act of 1978 led to the institution of American swimming's current national governing federation, USA Swimming. The passage of the Act freed the national federation from the organizational umbrella of the AAU, but USA Swimming is intimately related to FINA in terms of global swimming governance; USA Swimming is the local enforcement of FINA. This is evident in United States Swimming's first rulebook's (1981) persistent and explicit references and deference to FINA[56], foremost in the section about reporting world records but also in the rules and rules enforcement section, demonstrate the hierarchical, and interconnected relationships in international

[56] Originally instituted as Unites States Swimming (USS), the organization officially switched its name to USA Swimming in 1998 (USA Swimming History, 2015). Throughout this section on the rulebooks I use both USS and USA Swimming, depending upon what the organization was called at the time.

sport. The relationship is most prominent, however, in Article 61.1, "Objectives," where the organization's objective

> shall be to promote and develop swimming for the benefit of swimmers of all ages and abilities, in accordance with the standards and under the rules prescribed by the Fédération Internationale de Natation Amateur (FINA), United States Swimming, Inc. (USS), and the Local Swimming Committee (LSC) (1981, p. 104).

Essentially, this rule binds swimming governance in the United States to USS, its local groups of teams, and under the broader structure of FINA and, therefore, the Olympic System (Chappelet & Kübler-Mabbott, 2008).

A close focus on USA Swimming rulebooks' codified standards of eligibility reveals how shifting meanings of eligibility indicate the role of sporting structures in the commodification of athletes. I examine how these rules changed in the national federation's rulebooks from the first official rulebook published in 1981 until 2004, the first Olympic year after Phelps's $1,000,000 bonus announcement in November 2003. These shifts in eligibility document a process through which the "Olympics are being pushed towards an almost total acceptance of open professionalism" (Tomlinson & Whannel, 1984, p. x).

Born in 1985, Michael Phelps's swimming life took place entirely within the governance of USA Swimming and after the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles, the so-called "Corporate Games" (Gruneau, 1984). His career was possible only due to the liberalization of "amateurism." In fact, were Michael Phelps to have been born a quadrennial or more earlier, he quite literally might not have been able to become *Michael Phelps, Greatest Olympian of All-Time*. Despite his historic and singular talent,

he could not have sustained as long a (professional) swimming career in any other previous swimming era.

Established in 1981, USA Swimming's initial rulebook[57] incorporated United States Swimming as "the first official publication of United States Swimming, the newly formed National Governing Body for swimming in this country" (United States Swimming, 1981, p. 1) and codifying the strict rules of eligibility, primarily influenced by the Olympics' longstanding class-based ideologies of amateurism.

Article 43 enumerates how a swimmer is eligible to compete in United States Swimming: the primary focus is on the "amateur swimmer" maintaining his [*sic*] amateur status. The sort of amateurism championed by Brundage (Guttmann, 1984) and challenged by Paddock (Gleaves & Llewellyn, 2012) is present in the Article: "[a]n amateur swimmer is one who engages in swimming solely for pleasure and the physical, mental and social benefit derived therefrom, and to whom swimming is nothing more than recreation for which no renumeration is received" (United States Swimming, 1981, p. 97-98). It is an exclusive category with extensive restrictions. Maintaining amateur

[57]The 1981 rulebook sets the basic template. It is over a 160 pages, including blank pages and corporate sponsors' advertisements. It is segmented into five parts, with the first part, "Technical Rules," being the longest. As the title suggests, this part explains the rules for the sport, including the four different strokes; how meets at the local, regional, national levels should be organized; how meet sites are chosen; rules for youth and senior swimming classifications; standardizations of facilities; and the categories of officials (United States Swimming, 1981). The second part, "Code of Regulations of United States Swimming, Inc.," enumerates the administrative structure of the Corporation. Part three, "Athletes and Athletic Events," explains how a swimmer can become a member; how a club can be a part of the organization; what kinds of awards are available; who gets to represent which team; and who is eligible to be a member. The next part, "Athletes' Rights, Hearings, and Rights of Appeals," is further demarcation of the administrative body but offers insights into how decisions of eligibility, membership, representation, etc. can be appealed, and who can make these decisions. Finally, part five, "By-Laws of the Local Swimming Committee," offers even more information about how regional organization of the actual swimming teams/clubs are constructed and how they should operate. The book concludes with section of World, American, and U.S. Open records, and then has five appendices. Article 43, "Eligibility," in Part three, "Athletes and Athletic Events" is of most interest in this section.

eligibility is based on the expectations that an amateur swimmer cannot be paid for coaching, competing, or giving exhibitions.

In order to retain their amateur eligibility, swimmers had to follow a laundry list of rules set forth by their inter/national federation. An athlete can compete only against other amateur swimmers, unless it is in approved life-saving or military competitions. A swimmer who wants to maintain amateur status cannot gamble on swimming, nor can they accept reimbursement of travel expenses in "excess of the actual justifiable amount" (United States Swimming, 1981, p. 98). Finally, swimming awards cannot be appraised at more than $100, and the amateur swimmer cannot sell prizes or awards won through competition. Moreover, rules are in place to prohibit amateur swimmers from adopting Paddock's cynical maneuvering while maintaining eligibility (Gleaves & Llewellyn, 2012): they "shall not capitalize on his athletic fame" by using their name to promote goods or services, sell their autograph, or appear in radio or television programs (United States Swimming, 1981, p. 98). Amateur swimmers cannot accept compensation for wearing certain swimwear or equipment and they cannot engage in any occupation that is directly linked to their swimming success; nor can they be paid for "attaching his [sic] name to press contributions which he himself [*sic*] has not written" neither can they participate in a film, "unless he is a recognized film actor" (*Ibid.*). However, FINA and USS may use the amateur's likeness or image for their benefit.

While these rules do seem quite Brundage-like in their antiquity, 1981 athletes are allowed some compensation that even a decade earlier might have led to sanctions. Amateur swimmers can engage in "elementary teaching" or work as a lifeguard and they can receive some financial assistance for their travel and expenses related to international

competition. Finally, USS allows some compensation for financial loss while away from their work preparing for and competing in international events, which was known as "broken-time payments" and was the root of earlier struggles over definitions of amateurism and governance of Olympic sport (Llewellyn & Gleaves, 2014b). The organization also allows for a relatively clear and transparent appeals process for any swimmer who wishes to challenge a ruling of ineligibility (US Swimming Rulebook, 1981, p. 98-99).

These strict amateur boundaries and regulations remain constant for much of the 1980s. From 1981 until 1987, the rulebooks codify the actions that revoke a swimmer's eligibility (amateur status) while perpetuating class-based ideological amateurism rooted in notions of purity and love for sport: an "amateur swimmer is one who engages in swimming solely for pleasure and the physical, mental and social benefit derived therefrom, and to whom swimming is nothing more than recreation for which no remuneration is received" (US Swimming Rulebook, 1987, p. 93).

Finally, in 1984 – the same year the private Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee demonstrates that the Olympics can be immensely profitable through private-public corporate partnerships (Gruneau, 1984; Real, 2010; Tomlinson & Whannel, 1984) – the swimmers got some concessions allowing them to take part in the orgy of commercialism and commodification. From 1981-1983, an amateur swimmer's eligibility would be revoked if he/she knowingly competed against or with non-amateurs[58]. This rule was relaxed in 1984 when athletes were permitted to compete in Masters swimming competitions and in "other team sports than swimming" (US Swimming Rulebook, 1984,

[58]With the notable exception of "approved life-saving activities" or as a member of the armed service, in an armed service competition (US Swimming Rulebook, 1981, 1982, 1983).

p. 113)[59]. But, this was not the biggest change in how amateur status was reformed. The article added three new ways for amateurs to make money from swimming, as long as they were "first approved by FINA or USS and the advertising or promotion clearly so indicates, and, provided further, that the monetary advantages inure to the benefit of FINA, USS, or an organization first approved by USS" (*Ibid.*).

These three new ways did provide athletes ways to make some money from their swimming, although regulated by USS. First, swimmers could now use their name, image, or performance to promote or sell goods. Second, they were allowed to appear in mass media as a direct result of their swimming performance and/or abilities. Third, they could receive financial compensation for wearing/using a certain good that "displays advertising in excess of that normally used commercially" – provided that that good did not directly compete with a corporate sponsor of USS (US Swimming Rulebook, 1984, p. 114). The amateur swimmer is also allowed monetary compensation for coaching work – provided that it is not their "primary vocation" (US Swimming Rulebook, 1984, p. 115).

Clearly the Samaranch-led movement to liberalize amateurism across the IOC (Senn, 1999) appears in the 1984 rulebook, but many restrictions remain for any swimmer wishing to maintain their eligibility to compete at international swimming competitions for the United States. Masters swimmers are tainted competitors no longer, but an athlete gives up their eligibility upon registering as a Masters swimmer (US Swimming Rulebook, 1984). In a continuation of the previous year's statutes, an amateur swimmer "shall not capitalize on his [*sic*] athletic fame" by either earning any money

[59]Masters Swimming organized competitive swimming for adults who are not technically registered in USA Swimming, which has age groups of 8 and under, 9-10, 11-12, 13-14, 15-18, and "Open," which is any registered swimmer over the age of 15 and/or who can meet the specific time requirements for the event. Masters swimmers compete in age groups ranging from 18-24 up to 100-104 (usms.org).

from work "wherein his usefulness or value arises chiefly" from his fame due to swimming rather than the swimmer's ability to the specific job at hand, or by "attaching his name to press or literary contributions which he has not himself written" (US Swimming Rulebook, 1984, p. 113[60]).

In 1988, the Olympic year where the "athlete's code" is first put into practice by the IOC, the codified rules of eligibility are similar; amateurism is still defined by the swimmer's pursuit of swimming "solely for pleasure and the physical, mental and social benefit" of the activity. For the first time, however, the specter of "doping" is introduced as a threat to eligibility (US Swimming Rulebook, 1988, p. 94). Any athlete using a substance listed as "banned" by the IOC will be classified as "doping" and will be punished. USS will rely upon the IOC's "banned list" and "definition of 'doping'" (US Swimming Rulebook, 1988, p. 95). The IOC's instantiation as the final authority on doping maintains the hierarchical, top-down governance structure of the sport. Additionally, USA Swimming transfers the burden of governing one's own eligibility onto the elite swimmer by publishing the *availability* of a list of banned substances without explicitly publishing the list itself; elite swimmers must take responsibility for what they consume and for what is on the banned list. This may make sense because "new" banned substances might emerge, causing the list to be updated. However, placing the onus for maintaining eligibility onto the swimmers themselves continues the practice of self-governance that is apart of competitive swimming from a young age (Chambliss, 1988; Lang, 2010) and is apart of late capitalist and neoliberalism (Giroux, 2003; 2004).

[60] This clause, 343.8, continues in the 1985 Rulebook, and in 1986-1989 Rulebooks, as 304.8.

Eligibility rules continue to shift throughout the last decade of the 20th century. The rulebook for 1990, two years after Steffi Graf competed in the Seoul Olympics and two years before the "Dream Team" would take the courts in Barcelona, marks the biggest change yet in eligibility for US Swimming. First and foremost, the word "amateur" is completely stricken from the book. The eligibility article shrunk from an inflated sixteen clauses with multiple sub-clauses in 1989 (304.1-304.16) to only six clauses with one single sub-clause on "doping" in 1990.

The 1990 eligibility rules allow swimmers opportunities to earn income from their swimming, although these opportunities are still regulated and limited by US Swimming. According to the rulebook, a current USS member swimmer is "eligible to compete in competitions unless he [*sic*] has competitive swimming as his sole occupation or business on which he is financially dependent on living" and they can capitalize on their swimming, provided that the financial advantage "must be approved, administered, and controlled by USS…[and] shall not be available to the swimmer before the end of his [sic] competitive career except for approved expenses" (US Swimming, 1990, p. 98). Economic restraints are loosened and definitions of "doping" continue to be solidified – but the swimmer's responsibility of self-governance expands, mostly through acceptance of eligibility rulings made by US Swimming under the auspices of FINA and/or the IOC (US Swimming Rulebook, 1990). This further implants enforcement into the Olympic System and makes matters of "doping" more important to preserving eligibility.

As US Swimming membership and corporate sponsorship grows[61], the eligibility articles in 1991 and 1992 remain the same (US Swimming Rulebook, 1991, 1992). US Swimming continues loosening its economic restrictions on eligibility. In 1993, one year after American swimmers won one quarter of all of the United States' medals at the Barcelona games, the USS House of Delegates voted to create a "money-for-medals" support fund of $600,000 (USA Swimming History, 2015). That year's Rulebook removes the need for the swimmer to "account to USS for any financial advantage gained based on athletic fame and/or competitive results," thus further deregulating how an eligible swimmer can capitalize on his or her swimming fame (US Swimming Rulebook, 1993, p. 100). There are no substantive changes to the "doping" clause, but an expansion and reification of the links between USS, FINA, the USOC, and the IOC are enumerated quite forcefully in the new clause,

> **304.5** USS, as a member national governing body (NGB) of the United States Olympic Committee (USOC), and as a member Federation of the Federation Internationale de Natation [*sic*] (FINA), participates in the Doping Control Programs of both organizations, and particularly in out-of-competition drug testing ("Short Notice Drug Testing"). Each athlete member of USS is obligated without reservation or condition to submit himself/herself to all doping control policies and procedures adopted from time to time by both the USOC and FINA. (US Swimming Rulebook, 1993, p. 100-101)

The clause also continues the shift of governance onto the athlete him- or herself by making it the individual athlete's responsibility to follow the rules and procedures,

[61]In 1991, Philips petroleum agreed to a four-year extension of their corporate sponsorship. US Swimming had 26 corporate sponsors worth over $1 million in 1992 alone – also the first year that membership in US Swimming tops 200,000 (USA Swimming History, 2015). That year, 1992, marks the first year that USA Swimming offers financial assistance to elite swimmers when they provide $1200/month to Olympic team members. In the non-Olympic year of 1993, national team members earned $400/month from USA Swimming. The history behind this practice is difficult to access, but former Olympian and current National Team Managing Director Lindsay Mintenko sent a brief e-mail indicating that she "was not sure how long this continued, [but the] next documentation was 1998," when they began a more formal tiered system (L. Mintenko, personal communication, September 21, 2015).

regardless of how often they change. Article 304 remains constant throughout the mid-1990s; USS continues to define eligibility primarily as not a person's "sole occupation," while solidifying it as the athlete's responsibility to follow "doping" rules and policies under the jurisdictions of USS, FINA, USOC, and the IOC (US Swimming Rulebook, 1994, 1995, 1996). At the same time, in 1995 – the year before the Atlanta games – the USS House of Delegates voted to reward swimmers winning a gold medal at the Olympics a $50,000 bonus (USA Swimming History, 2015).

The rulebook of 1997 marks the next major shift in eligibility, where eligibility is framed more around ideals of fair competition and "doping" at the elite levels than economic relations or the class status of the swimmer. A member swimmer is still eligible as long as swimming is not "his/her sole occupation or business on which he/she is financially dependent on living," and they can still refrain from reporting those financial gains to USS (US Swimming Rulebook, 1997, p. 105). However, new clauses focusing on "doping" added to the Article took effect on September 14, 1996, about a month after the completion of the Atlanta Olympics[62]. The new language in clause 304.4 further reifies the Olympic System, and reinforces the powers of USS, USOC, and FINA to govern and punish athletes.

[62] The rulebook indicates no specific reason for instituting this rule at this moment, but one main factor may have helped to make this new rule seem necessary: the unexpected improvement of Chinese women swimmers in the early to mid 1990s spurned a new fear of steroid use by women swimmers (Lohn, 2010; Magdalinksi, 2009). At Atlanta, Chinese women swimmers had some success, but the biggest story was Irish swimmer Michelle Smith, who surprised many in the swimming community with unexpected gold medals in the 400 freestyle, 200 and 400 individual medleys, and a bronze in the 200 butterfly. In the years leading up to Atlanta, Smith made great improvements with her husband-coach (a track athlete who was suspended for using a banned substance) (Lohn, 2010). During this initial post-Berlin Wall era, the extent of the state-sanctioned doping system of East German women swimmers were also first reported and confirmed (Magdalinski, 2009).

The salient change is in the next clause, 304.5. This clause previously announced that the IOC maintained a banned list and that that list was kept by the Medicine Director, this clause now adopts FINA rules articulating the definition of a doping offense, how that offense is determined, and the punishment for said doping offense through the pronouncement that it is the athlete's "obligation without reservation or condition to submit to all doping control policies and procedures adopted form time to time by USS, USOC, or FINA" including in and out of competition drug testing (US Swimming Rulebook, 1997, p. 106). The FINA rule adopted by USS lists numerous ways a "doping offense" might occur and the different sanctions for those offenses[63]. While international swimming has long had an adversarial relationship with performance-enhancing drugs[64], this shift in focus toward "doping" are framed around ideas of fair competition at the very moment that the IOC and its Olympic System partners are (re-)negotiating multi-million dollar partnerships with potential TOP sponsors and American television networks (Chappelet & Kübler-Mabbott, 2008; Senn, 1999). As the Olympics embrace themselves as a television spectacle, the integrity of the sporting competition becomes an important marketing component.

[63] A doping offense might occur if: a banned substance found in a "competitor's body tissue or fluid" (note the noun switch from "athlete" to "competitor"); the "use of taking of banned techniques"; admitting use of a banned substance or technique; a competitor failing or refusing to "submit to doping control"; encouraging or helping others to use banned substances or techniques – or admitting to doing so; and/or selling or trafficking banned substances. Furthermore, FINA maintains the list of banned substances and sets the numerous stratified sanctions for a doping offense, which are based on which banned substance/technique is used and how many times a competitor has been caught. (US Swimming Rulebook, 1997, pp. 106-107). Finally, in a completely new addition, a shaded box, titled "USOC Drug Hotline," dominates the whole page of the Rulebook. Underneath the title is the directive, "For the latest in drug information, contact USOC Drug Hotline at 1-800-233-0393," listed *eleven* times in the box (US Swimming Rulebook, 1997, p. 108).

[64] Primarily revolving around old Cold War-infused rivalries: the state-sanctioned systems of doping imposed upon East German women in the 1970s and 1980s (which proved to be accurate) and assumed, but never verified, actions of Chinese swimming officials in the 1990s (see Lohn, 2010).

By the following year, 1998, all remnants of amateurism are omitted. Concerns over whether swimming is a "sole occupation" are removed and eligibility is primarily achieved through the swimmer's self-compliance and acceptance of personal responsibility: it "is the responsibility of all USS members to comply with the rules and regulations of USS and the Rules, Constitution and Bureau decisions of FINA, as well as to avoid acting in any manner which brings disrepute upon USS or upon the sport of swimming" (US Swimming Rulebook, 1998, p. 108).

Meanings of "Eligibility" have shifted toward concerns over doping at the elite level, evident in the rhetorical and spatial dominance of "doping" and doping control in the Article. The remainder of Article 304 is the same as the previous year's catalog of USOC, USS, and FINA policies and rules while still maintaining that it is the competitor's obligation to submit to all of their doping control policies and procedures. The previous year's punishments for the different doping offenses remain unchanged, and the section's final page is again dominated by a shaded box containing multiple listings of the same toll-free number of the USOC Drug Hotline (US Swimming Rulebook, 1998).

The 1999 rulebook, the year before Phelps first becomes an Olympian, contained further changes in the notion of eligibility: it explicitly added a Code of Conduct. "Eligibility" is shifted forward to Article 303, and its rules of are the same as the previous year's, where USA Swimming (the name has officially changed) is concerned with athlete's taking responsibility for their own eligibility by knowing the rules and regulations of USA Swimming, FINA, and USOC doping controls (USA Swimming Rulebook, 1999).

Article 304 is re-formed into the Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct enumerates the importance of self-governance and personal responsibility and the privileging of competitive sport by articulating

> The mission of USA Swimming is to encourage participation and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of swimming. USA Swimming grants the privilege of membership to individuals and organizations committed to that mission. The privilege of membership may, therefore, be withdrawn or denied by USA Swimming at any time where USA Swimming determines that a member or prospective member's conduct is inconsistent with the mission of the organization or the best interest of the sport and those who participate in it (USA Swimming Rulebook, 1999, p. 110).

This article continues over the next two pages, enumerating how physical, sexual, alcoholic, and/or drug abuse can be a violation of this code and lead to punitive action from USA Swimming. In a continuation of the logics of personal responsibility, the USOC Drug Hotline shaded box is at the end of the next Part (USA Swimming Rulebook, 1999).

The years leading up to the Sydney games in 2000, Phelps's first Olympics, had seen USA Swimming liberalize their rules on amateurism to the point where they had voted on a money-for-medals program and were actively funding elite swimmers who had qualified as members of the national team (USA Swimming History, 2015; L. Mintenko, personal communication, September 21, 2015). By most commonsense approaches Olympic swimmers were becoming professionalized. The elitest of the elite could earn money through swimming performances and sponsorships and maintain their eligibility to swim at the premiere elite international events, provided that they complied with and submitted to the doping control policies and practices set forth by USA

Swimming, USOC, and FINA (USA Swimming Rulebook, 2000). By 2000, eligibility was solely about compliance with USA Swimming rules and policies, which are under the control of FINA (USA Swimming Rulebook, 2000) and, therefore, linked into the Olympic System.

In the years between Phelps's swim in Sydney in 2000 and his ascendancy to the "face of the Olympics" in Athens in 2004 (Sokolove, 2004), the Code of Conduct remained unchanged. A swimmer maintained his/her eligibility by following the guidelines listed by the Code of Conduct, staying self-vigilant, and practicing personal responsibility in staying up-to-date with the doping control policies. "Eligibility" and "Code of Conduct" remained largely the same in 2001, excepting a small box of text added to indicate that two new regulatory organizations, USADA and WADA, will work with USA Swimming, USOC, and FINA to administer the doping control[65] (USA Swimming Rulebook, 2001).

By now, as a professional individually sponsored by Speedo, the multinational swimwear company that was also a corporate sponsor of USA Swimming, Michael Phelps is on the cover of the 2002 Rulebook. Subtle changes in the "Eligibility" and "Code of Conduct" sections focused on refining the language encouraging further self-governance and personal responsibility for competitors to be aware of the anti-doping policies and procedures of USA Swimming, USOC, USADA, and FINA. In that spirit, Article 303 now offers two websites for swimmers to visit for "current anti-doping rules of the USOC, FINA and USADA" (USA Swimming Rulebook, 2002, p. 103). To further

[65]These acronyms stand for World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA), Chappelet and Kübler-Mabbott (2008) call these new actors "regulators" in their concept of the Olympic System. For a compelling argument about how these organizations are anti-constitutional and anti-democratic, see the 12/29/2009 *Outside* article, "Good Cop, Bad Cop" by Brian Alexander.

illustrate its commitment to the swimmers practicing personal responsibility, it added a whole new paragraph in Article 303, "Eligibility,"

> As a condition of membership in USA Swimming, it is *the responsibility of each athlete member* of USA Swimming *to comply* with the anti-doping rules of the FINA, USOC and USADA and *to submit*, without reservation or condition, to in-competition and out-of-competition doping controls conducted by either the FINA or USADA. (Out-of-competition doping controls may take place at USA Swimming elite-level camps, training sessions at USOC facilities, or no advance notice any time for athletes designated by USA Swimming and USADA for inclusion in USA Swimming's no advance notice testing pool). (USA Swimming Rulebook, 2002, p. 103; emphasis mine)

USADA and the Olympic System are further empowered because in any case of inconsistencies in terms of doping, USADA rules supersede USA Swimming rules (USA Swimming Rulebook, 2002). The same punishments for the various drug offenses are illuminated next and the USADA Drug Reference Line shaded box is at the end of Part Four of this rulebook. This is how the "Eligibility" and "Code of Conduct" articles the USA Swimming Rulebooks remained up until 2004, when Phelps won eight medals at Athens after gaining recognition for himself and his sport by re-signing with Speedo and agreeing to the $1,000,000 bonus if he matched Spitz's medal haul from Munich in 1972.

Conclusion

Long a commercial enterprise, the Olympic Games have also become a prominent televised spectacle in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Andrews, 1998; Billings, 2008; Boykoff, 2013; Chappelet & Kübler-Mabbott, 2008; Guttmann, 2002; Horne & Whannel, 2012; Lenskyj, 2000; Tomlinson & Whannel, 1984). Its sports schedules and presentation are often driven and created with billions of television-watching people from around the world in mind (Billings, 2008; Hogan, 2003; Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009).

However, despite the inarguable fact that the Olympics are a televised spectacle, they are an elite sporting event, where the international sporting structures of the IOC, NOCs, IFs, and NFs preside over the actual sporting events and competitors.

Amateurism was a defining characteristic of Olympic sport, but it was (and is) a "fluid and dynamic ideology open to numerous interpretations, broad applications, and external social and political forces" (Llewellyn & Gleaves, 2014b, p. 2). As IOC president from 1952-1972, Avery Brundage championed amateurism and was the driving force behind codifying a strict interpretation (Guttmann, 1992; Llewllyn & Gleaves, 2014b; Senn, 1999). The IOC has faced existential financial struggles almost since its inception in 1896 (Guttmann, 1992; Llewellyn & Gleaves, 2014a, 2014b), but it began to see television and corporate sponsorships as lucrative sources of revenue in the 1970s and 1980s (Senn, 1999). Thinking that television viewers would be most interested in watching the best athletes – defined as professionals – the IOC began to liberalize its stance on amateurism in the 1970s under IOC President Lord Killanin and then in the 1980s under Juan Antonio Samaranch (Senn, 1999). Liberalizing amateurism went hand-in-glove with the hyper-commercialization of the Olympic Games themselves, culminating in the 1984 Los Angeles Games, which, as Gruneau (1984) argues, "are best understood as a more fully developed expression of the incorporation of sporting practice into the ever-expanding marketplace of international capitalism" (p. 2).

The hyper-commercialization of the Olympics occurring in the late-20th century also allowed space for Olympians to take part in their own commodification for their own economic and social gain. As a decorated participant in every Summer Olympics in the 21st century, Michael Phelps's entire elite swimming career took place after most

references to amateurism were removed, and athletes' eligibility shifted toward concerns revolving around an individual athlete's submission to the global capital sporting infrastructure. He signed his first sponsorship deal with Speedo in 2001, and by 2012, after becoming the most decorated Olympian in history at his fourth – and at the time final – Olympics in London, Phelps reportedly had endorsement deals with eleven corporations, including Subway, Omega, Under Armour, VISA, Proctor & Gamble, and Speedo. Selling his likeness, his body, his narrative, and his self to these companies helped him attain an estimated personal net worth of nearly $40,000,000 (Badenhausen, 2012; Mackey, 2012). In 2015, he became a literal brand by working with swimwear company Aqua Sphere to create the *MP* line of swimsuits and swim equipment (Stewart, 2015).

But, as an Olympic swimmer, he is still subject to the governance of the IOC, the USOC, FINA, and USA Swimming. His status as a professional swimmer who swims in the Olympics demonstrates the roles sporting structures play in the commercialization and commodification of the Olympics and elite global sport, and how these processes reflect similar economic and political changes in the United States. Rather than simply reducing this role to a passive idea of "deregulation," this chapter demonstrates the active roles in commercialization and commodification played by international sporting structures.

At the age of 23, Michael Phelps was awarded a $1,000,000 bonus by one of his sponsors, Speedo, on national television after winning a record eight gold medals at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. At that same age, in 1972, Mark Spitz – the man whose record Phelps broke – cashed in on his historic Munich performance by earning $1,000,000 by

posing with his seven medals draped around his neck (McMullen, 2006). Spitz gave up his Olympic eligibility as soon as he earned money from that iconic picture, while Phelps accepted his $1,000,000 check on NBC, the official channel of the Olympics in the US, and had been a professional swimmer since 2001. Immediately after the Beijing Games, he promised to swim in the London Games in 2012 and, after a short retirement, has returned to the pool in an effort to qualify for the 2016 Olympics in Rio[66] and promote his swimwear company. In the 36 years between those $1,000,000 paydays for the world's most dominant swimmers of their respective era, definitions of eligibility changed where swimmers (and other Olympians) are free to personally capitalize off of the Olympic Industry's commodification of them, however this "freedom" occurs within the sporting structures and reinforces late capitalism where the market dictates worth.

[66]His chances for qualifying for Rio look promising because he was the top ranked swimmer in the world in three events in 2015, the 100-meter and 200-meter butterfly events, and the 200-meter individual medley.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

American swimmer Michael Phelps is the most decorated Olympian in the history of the Modern Games. He has won twenty-medals while competing in four Games, and is well on his way toward a fifth this summer in Rio de Janeiro. This medal count is more than any other previous Olympian and more than some nations' entire Modern Olympic team medal haul. In 2000, he became the youngest American man to swim in the Olympics since Ralph Flanagan in 1932 when he finished fifth in the 200-meter butterfly at the age of 15. One year later, he set his first world record and became a professional swimmer. In 2004, in Athens, he became the first man to win eight individual medals in one Summer Games (he won six gold and two bronze medals). Over the first dozen years of the 21st Century, he dominated the sport of swimming at the international level by winning over 30 world championship medals and at the national level, with over 30 national championships. *Swimming World* named him the World Swimmer of the year seven times and the American Swimmer of the year nine times. He won the James E. Sullivan Award in 2003, was named the USOC Sportsman of the Year in 2004, 2008, 2011, and 2012, and was the first swimmer to be awarded the *Sports Illustrated* Sportsman of the Year in 2008.

In Beijing, in 2008, Michael Phelps captivated the nation by winning eight gold medals in eight events to break Mark Spitz's individual Games' record, and set the record for most career Olympic gold medals (also held by Spitz, and shared with American track athlete Carl Lewis, Finish runner Paavo Nurmi, and Soviet gymnast Larissa Latynina). For his accomplishments, Phelps won a $1,000,000 bonus from his primary sponsor Speedo and became a household name across the nation. His quest for the record was

covered by national and local newspapers and was featured in local and national television stations. His final races in Beijing, the 100-meter butterfly and the 4x100-meter medley relay, were played on big screens at professional baseball and football stadiums.

In the years after Beijing, he continued to train and build his endorsement profile as a spokesman for companies like VISA, Subway, Omega, and Speedo. In London 2012, he cemented his status as a swimming great by winning six more medals, four of them gold (and two silver). He is the first male swimmer to win the same Olympic event in three straight Games, and he did it in two events, the 100-meter butterfly and the 200-meter individual medley. His considerable accomplishments certainly warrant his inclusion into any discussions or debates about the "Greatest Olympian of All-Time" and FINA's awarding of the lifetime achievement award to Phelps in London was a fitting conclusion to his storied Olympic career.

Phelps was adamant that the London Games were his last, the "cherry on top" of his successful career (Crouse, 2012c, p. D1); he was finished with swimming because he had nothing else to accomplish in the pool (Brady, 2012d; Crouse, 2012d). But, after spending almost year away from the pool, Phelps felt the pull to return to swimming. On April 14, 2014, he officially announced that he would be returning to the competitive swimming world. Many fans of swimming were excited to see his historic return: *what else could Phelps accomplish? What astounding swimming feats does he have in store for us now?* But, more importantly, his return matters ideologically. The return of Phelps's swimming body provides opportunities for his narrative to be reinforced and enhanced, his brand to be extended. While there was the possibility for his legacy to be tarnished – if he did not swim well or if there were any public missteps (which there were) – Phelps

and his team worked from the outset to provide space to reclaim or recover the dominant narrative of Michael Phelps, the Greatest Olympian of All-Time.

His "soft" comeback, as coach Bob Bowman categorized it, began at the Mesa Grand Prix on April 24, 2014 (Clarey, 2014). Phelps had not raced competitively since the London Olympics nearly two years earlier. While the news was reported by some outlets as a surprise since Phelps had long maintained that he would not swim past the age of thirty, most sport reporters – especially those within the swimming community – saw his 2013 admission into the United States Anti-Doping Administrations' testing pool, the official step that all Olympic hopefuls must take in order to be eligible to swim at the international levels, as the foreshadowing to an inevitable comeback (Keith, 2013).

Both Phelps and Bowman indicated that, although this meet marked Phelps's return to competition, it was not necessarily a return to the Olympics. In fact, they took great care to keep expectations low for this "soft comeback." This was most evident in the pre-Mesa Grand Prix press conference where the first reporter welcomed Phelps back to swimming, repeated his own words about never swimming past thirty to him and asked for the motivation behind this comeback. To this Phelps replied:

> I think, for me, being able to do really *nothing* for a year and a half, two years…I traveled. I played golf. I gained thirty pounds. [Laughs]. You know, I had a lot of fun and there was something that I missed… being back in the pool, being able to go to the pool and be back at North Baltimore and swim with the group that we have now: it's incredible…and I just missed being back in the water…I'm doing this because I want to. Nobody's forcing me to do this…I'm doing this because I want to be back in the water. (USA Swimming, 2014b)

Many reporters in the press conference took Phelps's seemingly sincere desire to swim again at face value. However, some were concerned with how this comeback, especially in a sport that has endured "failed" comebacks from other swimming greats

Ian Thorpe and Mark Spitz, would harm his legacy and/or the sport of swimming[67]. Others were concerned with what Phelps's return to the sport "said" about the sport's status. Some feared that the popularity of Phelps's return indicated that swimming could not maintain its swimming success and popularity without Phelps, *was USA Swimming in danger of losing its dominance? Did nobody want to watch a Phelps-less Olympics?* Was Phelps's goal of "changing the sport of swimming" so temporary where only his return could keep it from remaining an "every four years" sport?

While the media may have had these concerns, many of Phelps's contemporaries were excited by his return. Fellow 2012 Olympic gold medalist Conor Dwyer texted journalist Phil Hersh, writing that "Michael is the greatest swimmer of all time. His return to competition will drive excitement and interest not only for fans and media but also his fellow swimmers" (Hersh, 2014). Olympian Jessica Hardy echoed Dwyer's sentiment, saying that Phelps's "accomplished everything you pretty much can…[and his return] is great for the sport and each athlete particularly to keep learning from him" (Associated Press, 2014). Multiple gold-medalist, and 1996 Olympic torch relay member, Janet Evans voiced her support as well. Evans, whose own comeback to competitive swimming culminated in her participation at the 2012 Olympic Trials at the age of 40, speculated that Phelps missed the training routine and the competition and said that these needs – along with the fact that he is still relatively young – drove Phelps's return, saying "you have the rest of your life to do whatever you want, so why not [return]?" She continued, saying that while "I would like to see U.S. swimming find another Michael Phelps…[his

[67]Australia's Ian Thorpe – widely considered the greatest swimmer in the world before Phelps – attempted to make the 2012 Olympic team after almost five years away from the sport. At the age of 41, Spitz capitalized on his name recognition in a couple of made-for-television match races in an ill-fated attempt at making the 1992 US Olympic team.

comeback] is good. It raises the game for other competitors….[and] will inspire young kids for another four years" (Caple, 2014).

Michael Phelps's goal was/is to change the sport of swimming by making it more popular for American sporting audiences. Invariably, his return was framed as good for the sport of swimming. Executive director of USA Swimming, Chuck Wielgus, praised Phelps's return, saying that "USA Swimming and Michael share the goal of growing the sport, and his return to competition will surely inspire even more kids to give swimming a try" (Caple, 2014). Olympic gold medalist and NBC commentator Rowdy Gaines enthusiastically likened Phelps's return to Michael Jordan's 1995 comeback, claiming that it means "so much to our sport…it will be a big boost again regardless of how he does" (*Ibid.*). Ironically or not, the media attention that Phelps's 2014 return received indicated that he did not achieve his goal of making the sport popular in non-Olympic years; it did, indeed, appear that swimming could not attain more mainstream popularity without Michael Phelps.

Phelps's first swims in Arizona were not record-breaking, but they did help to generate excitement for the sport. Crouse (2014) notes that young swimmers were excited to have the opportunity to swim with Phelps, while the meet sold large numbers of tickets. The future stars of swimming were not the only ones in Mesa excited by his return, Olympic veterans like Natalie Coughlin and Ryan Lochte were "happy" to see the added media attention, including helicopters filming the warm-ups and races, as well as swimming highlights "sandwiched between NBA and NHL playoff results" (Crouse, 2014). Thanks to Phelps's corporeal return to the pool, the sport – or at least Phelps's individual swim – was back in the headlines of newspapers and sporting news sites.

Phelps' comeback seemed to be going well after qualifying for the 2014 U.S. national team and winning five medals in six events at August's Pan Pacific championships in Australia[68]. But, once again during a down time in training, Phelps made the mainstream and sporting news for a September 30th arrest for driving under the influence of alcohol. Within a week of the arrest, Phelps issued an apology, was given a six-month suspension by USA Swimming and agreed to withdraw from the United States' World Championship team that was to compete in Russia in 2015. Shortly after his exit from his voluntary stint at the rehabilitation center, in early 2015, he moved to Arizona to train with Bob Bowman, who had become the coach at Arizona State University.

Phelps re-dedicated himself to training, and after serving his USA Swimming imposed suspension, returned to swimming competition at Mesa, Arizona's Grand Prix – the same place he had initially began his comeback. The rest of his swimming year was very successful. He won three national championships in August, and his times were the top times in the world in each one of his events, the 100-meter and 200-meter butterfly, as well the 200-meter individual medley.

In the late fall of 2015, Phelps began to re-assert the dominant narrative of his life through a series of public moves, most prominently a cover story in *Sports Illustrated* written by Tom Layden and called "A New Man" for the November 16 issue. For the first time since his Olympic success, Phelps appeared on the cover of the magazine. However,

[68]In 2014, USA Swimming attempted a more complicated and convoluted qualifying process for the 2015 World Championship team. Rather than using one Trials meet (like they had in the past for the Olympics and World Championships), the process involved multiple meet swims and standards. Phelps's performances at 2014 U.S. Nationals and 2014 Pan-Pacific Championships were good enough to qualify him for the U.S National team going to 2015 World Championships in Russia.

he was not in his swim gear, or wearing any medals. The cover was a white background with light grey and bright white writing, with the phrase "The Rehabilitation of Michael Phelps" on the bottom half of the cover. Phelps's head dominated the cover, and he wore a clean, white v-neck t-shirt, his bearded face portraying a sense of contentment and self-awareness that was previously not a part of his public persona.

Layden's story portrayed Phelps as finally "coming to terms with himself" through an important but emotionally difficult time (2015, p. 53). The article nominally centers on his rehabilitation after his second drunk driving arrest in September 2014, and the introspective process that was a part of that work, including a 45-day stint at a rehabilitation facility that helped Phelps reconcile with his estranged father, Fred. However, the article also re-asserts the dominant narrative that has long been at the heart of Michael Phelps, the Greatest Olympian of All-Time: near the end of the piece, after Layden has described all of the emotional and physical work that Phelps has done since his return to the pool, Phelps is quoted as saying "I'm back to being the little kid who once said anything is possible" (quoted in Layden, 2015, p. 63). Layden (2015) describes how his close friends and family members, including Bowman, his mother Debbie, his new fiancée, his sisters, his longtime friends, and his father, all credit Phelps's most recent successes to his newfound emotional maturity and rededication to training. While Layden, and the people close to Phelps he interviewed, frames these characteristics as part of a new Phelps, they fall into the similar narratives of individual willpower and mental toughness long at the heart of Michael Phelps, the Greatest Olympian of All-Time.

In 2004 and 2008, Phelps's mental toughness had been demonstrated by his ability to persist through difficult workouts or to use naysayers as motivation or to will himself off his ADHD medication or to win races despite adversity (Crouse, 2008g, 2008h; Phelps & Abrahamson, 2009; Phelps & Cazeneuve, 2012; Layden, 2004a; Sokolove, 2004). In 2015, his mental approach is still important, but it is not framed as "toughness." Rather, it is framed as emotional maturity, where "Phelps's greatest gift now sits atop his shoulders. He no longer performs to fulfill historical imperatives but for his own, rediscovered joy," and although there will be pressure and expectations for the 2016 Olympics, the newly mature Phelps will be ready, "a familiar face […] but a new man" (Layden, 2015, p. 63).

Reliance on elite sporting performance, and the training necessary to achieve it, as a way to redeem one's own self is a continuation of Phelps's dominate narrative. But, it is part and parcel of his broader narrative of the power of the individual to achieve their goals, because as he states in his autobiography, titled *No Limits*, "the essential truth" is that "nothing is impossible…with hard work, with belief, with confidence in yourself and those around you, there are no limits" (2009, p. 5-6) for any individual willing to work hard toward their goal.

On March 8, 2016, Phelps's sponsor, Under Armour, released a new commercial focusing on Phelps. The advertisement, which is part of the company's "Rule Yourself" campaign, was a ninety-second commercial where Phelps's "training regime is on display: He swims, lifts weights, eats" (Ember, 2016). The advertisement is set to The Kills' "The Last Goodbye," and contains multiple cuts of a solitary and bearded Phelps training, mostly in the dark. The most powerful recurring image is Phelps swimming in

an endless dark pool where only his lane is lit; the commercial ends with the campaign's tagline "It's what you do in the dark that puts you in the light" (Under Armour, 2016).

Phelps's accomplishments in the water are indeed remarkable. But, the title "Greatest Olympian of All-Time" is about more than just medals or decorations or records. To paraphrase Tomlinson and Whannel (1984), it would be wrong to think that Michael Phelps is just a special person or an extra-ordinary individual; Phelps is an embodiment of the cultural forces that surround him. Many forces shaped Michael Phelps, and I centered my analysis on three cultural forces in this dissertation: race, nation, and economic relationships.

Phelps embodies the sporting racial project of swimming in every stroke he takes. The logic of modern sport demands records and constant advances in technical knowledge, and Phelps is modern sport incarnate with every fast swim. While his white body is ever-present, it is also virtually ignored and unremarked-upon by the sporting media who celebrate him as an American sporting icon. His white swimming body is one of many in the long line of American swimming excellence, and was used as a way to further construct a racialized nation by perpetuating the processes of white cultural nationalism in the 21st century. But not only has his body perpetuated the construction of the white sporting racial project, late capitalism and its entanglement with the Olympic Industry helped to perpetuate Phelps's swimming body. Without the developments of late capitalism that allowed an extremely talented swimmer to continue swimming rather than be constrained by a 19th century amateur code, there would be no Michael Phelps, the Greatest Olympian of All-Time. Phelps is the embodiment of the white colonial frame that produced his white swimming body, a white cultural nationalism accelerated by fears

that post-9/11 America was under ideological attack, and the processes that liberalized eligibility in the late 20th century as the Olympic Industry sought to "maximize power and profit" (Lenskyj, 2000, p. 3). So, *of course*, Phelps is the Greatest Olympian of All-Time: the white American Olympic champion swimmer is the symbolic and physical expression of the Olympic Industry, an industry that relies on secular Euro-American political ideals and market logics to perpetuate a Eurocentric, white, patriarchal, neo/colonial project.

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