To my parents, both Northern and Southern – whom I am sure never thought in their wildest dreams they would have a child teach them so much about boxing in Nigeria. To them I owe my love of sports, history, pasta, and learning. Keep on Loving
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Since I started this dissertation project, I have been asked, for what feels like a million times, the same question (with all its variants) by all who hear about the topic of boxing in Nigeria: “are you yourself a boxer?” As a male, 6’1,” and 230 lbs., the question seems like the most obvious one to ask. Although I have never laced up the gloves and stepped into the ring, this dissertation and Ph.D. about boxing was, to me, very similar to a boxing career: one could say it resembles the buildup, preparation, training, rising up the rankings, and, ultimately, a championship boxing match. It required years of training, long hours away from family and friends, heartache, pain, disappointment, and in the end, success. In that way, let me both explain my road to this point, acknowledge those that helped me in some way towards my big fight for the dissertation and Ph.D. “title.” Without the help, support, and love of so many, my training would have been in vain. Those that helped are too many to name, but here is my attempt at it.

When I started this study, I very quickly learned of two Nigerian world champions in the sport of boxing: Hogan “Kid” Bassey in 1957, and Dick Tiger in 1962. It was the fact that Nigeria had two world champions that stood before and after independence in 1960 that drew my interest to Nigeria rather than other African nations. Through the Nigerian newspapers it became clear to me that Bassey, the country’s first world champion in any sport, had emerged as the hero of Nigeria in the buildup to independence and directly contributed to that political development. Bassey’s ascendancy stood in contrast to Tiger’s experiences ten years later when his success in the boxing ring encouraged him to publicly support the Biafra Republic during the civil war, which led to his fall from grace and early death in 1971. The stories of these two boxers motivated me to examine the sport of boxing in Nigeria more closely and
particularly the development of a boxing infrastructure- boxing leagues, clubs, rings, a steady supply of boxers, and an audience interested in seeing them fight- that would allow such champions to emerge. I expected to find hundreds of fighters and boxing clubs when I arrived in Lagos, Nigeria to carry out research. Instead, I felt that I was performing an archeological dig. I found decrepit facilities, a dearth of equipment, and a closed down National Stadium in Surulere. I went looking for boxing and found not the temples of boxing that produced these world champions, but the ruins of boxing’s glory days half a century before. I quickly realized that boxing is barely alive in Nigeria. Boxing no longer garnered the respect or attention of the nation like it did in the 1950s and 60s. How did this happen? What happened to boxing? The huge difference between the boxing as described in the newspapers in 1950s Nigeria and what I saw on the ground compelled me to ask how the popularity of boxing in the nation could rise and fall so quickly. With this question in mind, I wanted to write about the history of boxing’s rise and fall in Nigeria up to the present day, but I quickly realized that this was too large a project for a dissertation. Consequently, rather than ending my study with the death of Dick Tiger and the fall of boxing, this project would focus on the rise of boxing from obscurity to the start of the golden age with Bassey in the late 1950s. Doing so allowed me to concentrate on the colonial period and better situate boxing within the myriad of changes that occurred within colonialism, urbanization, empire, and masculinity during the twilight of empire.

Boxers are like PhD. students, we are always in need financial backing in order to do what we do, and I have been lucky enough to have found the support of several sources. I want to thank the Center for African Studies and the Center for European
Studies at the University of Florida who both supported me through pre-dissertation research in 2012 when I was trying to see if boxing was indeed popular in Nigeria during the postwar period, finding more sources and boxers than I could imagine. The following summer I was graciously supported by the British-Nigerian Educational Trust for three months of archival research and conducting oral interviews with former boxers in Lagos and Ibadan. In 2014, The Graduate School Dissertation Research Award at the University of Florida funded a 6-week research trip to Liverpool and London England, where I was able to sift through the Liverpool and British National Archives and newspapers to grasp the impact of Nigerians in the city and country. I am very fortunate to have been housed in the Center for African Studies at the University of Florida, and the intellectual environment it fosters and encourages, thanks to the tireless work of Todd Leedy, will not be forgotten. I will be waiting for my chance to present at an upcoming Baraza.

A boxer has what they call ‘seconds’ when fighting, and I have had the pleasure of having several ‘seconds’ in different parts of the world. While in Nigeria, I had the great fortune of meeting one of the kindest souls, Bamidele Ralph Ajayi. He started out as my research assistant and through successive trips to Nigeria we became close friends and now brothers. If it was not for him, I would not have been able to navigate Lagos, find the former boxers, locate the archives, or probably be alive. We talked for hours about the project, questions to ask, and meanings of boxing to Nigerians and how it has changed over the years from the most popular of sports to one of the most forgotten. I was not prepared for the scale and intensity that is Lagos, and without Bamidele, I would not have survived intact. I also want to thank his wonderful wife,
Adenike, who has become like a sister to me. I truly am grateful for their love, friendship, and support. A very big thank you to my Uncle Leonard Altilia, S.J. for not only his religious guidance in my family, but for his selfless devotion to Christ. Through his contacts, I was able to stay in Lagos with the Jesuits of North-West Africa Province, very close to the National Stadium in Surulere. Their kindness, hospitality, and guidance through Christ was very welcomed during a difficult time. I cherished our discussions over lunch and dinner, and they taught me the importance of religion to Nigerian daily life. I was most surprised to see that these Nigerian priests were as interested in my findings as I was, with several remembering the charismatic boxing figures of their youth.

While in Nigeria, I was fortunate enough to be housed at the University of Ibadan for summer research at the archives and collaboration through the Sociology and History departments. The National Archives at Ibadan staff were very knowledgeable and did their best to get me what they could find, although that was never easy. They did point me several times in different directions that boxing was in association. The History and Sociology Departments pointed me to local boxers, boxing clubs, and former boxing greats, whose insight into the local changes and importance of boxing I will be forever grateful, like Jaguu in Ibadan, Abraham Adeyemi Jones, Olu Moses, Adeniji Adele, Jerry Okorodudu, Isaac Ekpo, Whitehorse, the Professor, et. Al. Also a big thank you to the Nigerian Sports Federation who graciously let me look at their archives, and discuss the history of sport and coaching with several key members.

While in Liverpool, I had the pleasure of meeting and working with Jim Jenkinson, the Secretary of the Merseyside Former Boxers Association. Jim introduced
me to the Association and its brother association, the Wirral Former Boxers’ Association, and through several interviews with him and his wife, I was better able to appreciate the impact that Nigerian and other Empire boxers had on the port city. Jim invited me into his home, and made me copies of hundreds of articles in various boxing magazines from his collection. I am very grateful for his help, and for pointing me in the right directions in Liverpool to find boxers and locate Nigerians within the city. It was in discussions with Jim and other boxers that I was able to realize the importance of boxing in the empire. This changed the direction of research, as I was unaware of the importance of the British Empire Boxing Championship.

Through Jim, I also had the distinct pleasure to meet Tony Smith, a former Liverpool boxer who had sparred, fought, trained, and befriended many of the Nigerian boxers listed in this dissertation. He was gracious enough to mail me a picture of him and the boxers from the late 1950s. Once back home, I looked for his phone # and email to thank him and found that I did not have it. I assumed I lost them, but in fact he never gave them to me. When I went back to Liverpool the following year, Tony was upset – I didn’t write back to thank him or remain in contact. Tony is the only second that I had treated poorly, and for that I am truly sorry. I want to thank Tony Smith, and apologize.

While in Liverpool, I was able to meet Dmitri van den Bersselaar, a historian of West Africa at the University of Liverpool. Dmitri’s knowledge of the archives, especially the Unilever Archive in Sunlight pointed me to a direction of research that I hadn’t considered yet, and opened many doors for future research. I look forward to many years of academic collaboration with him on sport in Africa. I am also thankful for the
help of Diane Backhouse and navigating the United Africa Company records at the
Unilever Archives.

Being a boxer or PhD student comes with a large amount of financial insecurity,
and when doing research in London, I was faced with the difficult task of finding
accommodations that would allow me to afford to stay long enough to get the
information I needed. I was very lucky that one of my brother’s very good friends, Samir
Jhaveri, was domiciled in London and he and his wife graciously put me up in their
place and spared me the cost of lodging in London. To them I am thankful, for London
might well have bankrupted me otherwise.

Climbing the ranks towards the Ph.D. title, like the fighter in the ring, would not
be possible without the support and guidance from my coaches, but especially Luise
White. Her advice was wise, poignant, and direct – not afraid to tell me that I would lose
if I did not stay focused, write better, clearer, and always knew the larger implications of
my dissertation even when I could not see it yet. Like a good coach, she pushed me to
think beyond my initial reactions, question my assumptions, and reject my nonsense.
She did not always tell me what I wanted to hear, but told me countless time what I
needed to do, and through her guidance and wisdom I am here, tough enough to take
the challenges of academia. Like a good boxing coach, she always knew whether to
build me up, or give me tough lectures, but always with the end goal of making me a
better fighter in mind. Her humor, wit, wisdom, and intellect cannot be beat. Thank you
for staying in my corner and believing in me.

I also want to thank Matthew Jacobs for all his advice in being my teaching
mentor on more than one occasion, as I not only TA’d for him several times, but also
when I finally taught on my own. His encouragement, advice, experience, and enthusiasm for teaching shaped how I approach the classroom. He also was willing to sit through independent studies on Modern American and World Sports history, for which I am very grateful.

No fighter is able to make it to the top without the help of friends or sparring partners. The University of Florida History Department has created lasting friendships with several scholars/sparring partners that I cherish and will continue to cherish despite the distance between us that will no doubt ensue. I am so grateful for the dissertation support group, in which friends like Robert Taber, Timothy Fritz, Elyssa Gage, Jessica Taylor, Alana Lord, Christopher Woolley, Mallory Szymanski, Rebecca Devlin, Brenden Kennedy, Johanna Mellis, Erin Zavitz, Ralph Patrello, Andrew Welton, and Brian Hamm helped by reading several chapters and providing constructive criticism. More than that, they gave me encouragement in between rounds to keep going and not give up the fight, to refine my arguments, and to think in directions I had not considered. But it is the memories outside the walls of the University I will cherish as well. I will always treasure Thursday afternoon Mario Cart tournaments with the Taber family, Robert, Sarah, and Ainsley, or the time that Timothy Fritz and I were the Rowdiest Reptiles that made the trip to Dallas for the Final Four, or the SEC Championship in Atlanta. I won’t forget the early morning tailgates with Timothy, Alan Kent and Amanda Kent, Chris Ruehlen, Wes and the Kraken. I won’t forget the quest for stars or the writing sessions with Tim, or the running with Andrea when I thought I would die of exhaustion, or the tailgates, or the Southern, or the Springs, or Gasparilla, or Friday afternoon faculty vs students basketball, or gravy making with my consigliere Ralph Patrello, running stadiums and
climbing “Gator Mountain” with Wesley White, Jenn Lyon, or Noah Sims, or recording podcasts or watching basketball with Greg Mason, or the late night talks with incredible friends/roommates like Noah Sims, John Hames, Brandon Jett, and Erik Timmons. I won’t forget the golf with Clay Cooper, Brenden Kennedy, Chris Ruehlen, Andy Pilder. Finally, I will always remember the times that Mallory Szymanski, Alana Lord, and I went to watch NXT live, or drove three hours to watch Monday Night Raw. For all my friends I made at UF, thank you for your support, in whatever way you provided it.

Where would any boxer be without his or her family? Fortunately for me, I have family in Florida, my Southern Parents, my Aunt Mary Anne and Uncle John Sears, who became my rocks and support in the Sunshine State. I was so very lucky to be able to drive a few hours to Clearwater for home cooking, family, jokes, the beaches, and an escape from graduate school. This Ph.D. allowed me to connect with a part of the family that lives in the “far reaches of the empire.” They welcomed me in with open arms, a washer/dryer, and lots of pasta, and I am forever grateful. I am also so blessed to grow closer with my cousins Tom (and his wonderful wife Lindsey) and Robyn (and her wonderful husband Chris), and feel so happy to become the brother they never knew they wanted. I am happy to be Cousin Uncle Moustache to Tom’s kids Gavin, and my goddaughter Ember. Having family in Florida made this experience worth it. I am so thankful for this part of my family. Florida was my home for 6 years, but it became my home because of family.

I have been blessed by a wonderfully supportive family in Canada. Although the dissertation, and Skyping long-distance, might have strained the bonds, it did not sever the love within the clan. I am forever grateful for my family, my loving parents, my
brothers Jason and Stephen (and sisters-in-law Cher and Alicia), my sister Michelle (and brother-in-law Louis), and the nieces and nephews (Noah, Matthew, Mark, Lily, Lucy, James, Elise, David, Phillip). Training for such a fight far away from my home and native land was difficult, especially watching my nieces and nephews grow up at a distance, watching my parents grow older, watching my family have parties and celebrations in another country, and finally the realization that I would not be returning when this dissertation finished. The sacrifice was difficult and at times never felt worth it. But I am happy that I have had this experience, and in the end, though my address might change, home is also always Toronto. Although my grandparents all passed before they could see the man I have become or me accomplish this feat, I know that without them, and my larger family, I would not be here. Keep On Loving.

Despite all this help and all these wonderful people who shared in my journey to the top over the years, just as a boxer enters the ring is alone for the fight, any and all errors in this document are mine and mine alone. It is not the title that matters in the end, it’s the struggle to the top, the perseverance to continue when all hope is lost.

“Went the distance, now I am back on my feet…” (Survivor, Eye of the Tiger, 1982)
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BBBC  British Boxing Board of Control.

BNA  British National Archives at Kew

DS  Daily Service, a daily newspaper in Lagos founded by the Nigerian Youth Movement

LA  Liverpool City Archive and Family Museum

NAI  Nigerian National Archive in Ibadan

NBBC  Nigerian Boxing Board of Control, founded in 1949 with notable members like Douglas J. Collister as the first Chairman and Nnamdi Azikiwe as Secretary. The Board was in charge of sanctioning fights, guaranteeing prize money, medical exams, and licensing boxers, managers, and promoters.

NDT  The Nigerian Daily Times, one of the first daily newspapers in Lagos. Formerly the Lagos Daily Times.

WAP  West African Pilot, a popular newspaper in Lagos founded by Nnamdi Azikiwe.

WWI  World War One (1914-1918)

WWII  World War II (1939-1945)
NIGERIA IN THE RING: BOXING, MASCULINITY, AND EMPIRE IN NIGERIA, 1930-1957

By

Michael Gennaro

August 2016

Chair: Luise White
Major: History

This dissertation uses sport as a lens to view Nigerian society during the colonial and post-colonial eras, focusing on the development of boxing and boxing culture in Lagos, Nigeria’s largest city and economic capital, and the influence of Nigerian fighters abroad in England. In my dissertation I make three critical arguments. First, that British colonial sporting regimes built on and transformed masculinity, masculine ideals, and gender relations in a dynamic urban context. The British sporting ethos of discipline and character was adapted and transformed by young male Nigerians, who used boxing as both a sign of manliness and being modern in an urban environment. Being tough, physical, and yet gentlemanly in demeanor helped many young Nigerians attain social mobility when educational avenues to employment and economic resources were closed to them. Secondly, using a case study of boxing in Lagos this project reveals how boxing formed a part of the political, economic, and social changes during the colonial and postcolonial periods. The city overflowed with young, unmarried, and often unemployed men, many of whom gravitated towards boxing as an emotional and social outlet. Boxing grew in popularity the 1940s primarily through the creation of Boys’ Clubs, which were seen as a solution to a growing problem of juvenile delinquency.
Third, this study adds a dimension to the history of the “Black Atlantic” circuit, the creation of a Nigerian diaspora to England, specifically Liverpool, and explores the impact that the movement of sporting professionals and athletes have had on Nigerians. Nigerian boxers abroad like World Featherweight Champion Hogan “Kid” Bassey were “doing much to boost the prestige” of Nigeria internationally. Weekly accounts of the travails of Nigerians abroad were posted in the newspapers, inspiring young men to box and many Nigerians to take pride in their sportsmen.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Hogan Bassey, Hero of Nigeria

In June 1957, a Nigerian-born boxer who fought under the name Hogan ‘Kid’ Bassey and lived in Liverpool, England, won the World Featherweight Championship in Paris, France. Bassey instantly became, more than simply a champion, the hero of an up and coming Nigerian nation on its path to independence, which it would achieve a few years later in 1960. Bassey was heralded as the perfect gentleman, the ideal representative for Nigeria, and a model for men everywhere. His victory in the boxing ring was recorded in song and newspaper, and his name transcended the borders of his homeland, resounding in Nigeria, Liverpool, the British Empire, and the world. Bassey’s victory was one of national importance for Nigeria, but acceptance of the sport and the boxers who sacrificed their bodies for the public’s pleasure developed over decades, with occasional setbacks and staunch resistance. Bassey’s uncertain ascendancy as a boxer from Nigeria highlights the conditions and changes that moved boxing from a marginal sport in the colony following World War II to one of national importance in the 1950s.

Bassey’s ascension to the world featherweight championship ushered in a “golden age” for boxing in Nigeria. When Dick Tiger won the world middleweight title in 1962, the sport had reached the height of its popularity, and it seemed that boxing and Nigeria would continue to grow together. And indeed, this was the case for a few more years. Nigerian Nojim Maiyegun won Nigeria’s first ever Olympic medal, a bronze in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, and Dick Tiger won his second world title in 1966, this time at the Light Heavyweight Division. However, the affiliation between boxing and the state
began to disintegrate in the late 1960s. The problems of the early independence period and the subsequent Nigerian Civil War from 1967-1970 changed the relationship of boxing and its place within the nation. When Nigerian boxing hero Dick Tiger sided with the Republic of Biafra and dedicated his boxing and money to the Biafran cause, many felt that he turned his back on the Nigerian nation. The war appears to represent the turning point for the popularity and acceptance of the sport. By the early 1970s, less than fifteen years after Bassey’s world title victory, boxing’s popularity started to decline, and to this day boxing has never regained the prominence it enjoyed during the golden period of the 1950s and 1960s. Moreover, many people refuse to speak about Dick Tiger due to his political actions, and they often negatively association Tiger with the sport of boxing.¹ In subsequent decades, boxing was unable to reestablish a solid footing in Nigeria. But it is undeniable that for a brief period boxing was one of the paramount sports in the country. This dissertation looks at one part of this story – the rise of boxing from obscurity to the start of its golden age in the late 1950s.

While Hogan Bassey and his success represents the pinnacle of boxing and the ideal outcome for a boxer, thousands of other boxers laid the foundation for his experience in the preceding decades. They boxed for a variety of reasons, including money, fame, and even basic survival in the developing city of Lagos. As other scholars have demonstrated, spectacle is not effective or even significant without an audience. In addition to the boxers themselves, millions of other people living in Lagos, Nigeria, and elsewhere watched matches in person, listened to radio broadcasts about them, and

¹ Many former boxers and fans interviewed for this project refused to speak of Dick Tiger, his association to Biafra, or his legacy in the ring. Many quickly changed the subject to Hogan Bassey as a more ideal champion and representation of Nigeria’s history of boxing.
read about the events in newspapers. They cheered for their favorites and debated with friends about the skill and potential of particular boxers. When they were not actively watching, reading, or debating about matches, they waited in anticipation for news about their favorites. In the years following World War I, a generation of boxing enthusiasts emerged. The growing popularity of boxing in Lagos and elsewhere in Nigeria over the course of the first half of the twentieth century compels us to consider: why did boxers participate in matches despite the dangers inherent to boxing? Who watched, read, and debated about the nature of boxing, the effectiveness of particular boxers, and the outcomes of fights and why? Why did soccer or other sports not attain the same significance under colonialism? What was at stake for Nigerians in the development of boxing as a sport and the success of its fighters? Finally, what can the enthusiasm for boxing, whether negative or positive, tell us about the larger society, its social mores, values, ideals, and debates?

Although existing scholarship has examined the development and impact of other sports in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa, it has generally overlooked the relevance of boxing. The prominence of the sport in archival records, newspaper reports, and popular memory encourages a comprehensive study of the role of boxing in Nigeria, and specifically in the rapidly developing city of Lagos. This first academic history of boxing in Nigeria focuses on the case studies of Lagos in general and the careers of several prominent Lagosian boxers in particular to demonstrate the complex relationship between boxing, culture, masculinity, and politics in Nigeria from the end of World War I to the aftermath of Hogan Bassey’s victory in the World Featherweight Championship match of 1957, three years before the nation achieved independence. It
seeks to connect the experiences of urban Lagosians in an emerging nation to the growth and development of Nigerian boxing clubs, tournaments and competitions, boxers, and characters. In addition to using boxing as the point of access through which to examine domestic developments, this study will demonstrate how the participation of Nigerian boxers in the British Empire and World Championship fights served to connect Nigeria to the outside world and even encouraged its prominence on the international stage. In doing so, this work sheds light on the ways in which Nigeria was not merely impacted by, but participated in and influenced larger trends in the British Empire's political, economic, social, and sporting histories during the twilight of empire.

This dissertation makes four main arguments. First, it suggests that boxing encouraged the emergence of two forms of Nigerian masculinity in Lagos in the first half of the twentieth century. These two forms- “Muscular Citizenship” and a “bachelor subculture of masculinity”- were based on urban toughness, sport, and health, and they were shaped almost exclusively by young and unmarried men. Boxing is both a lens by which to analyze these masculinities as well an active factor that influenced their development. As boxers gained more prominence and media coverage, they became the ideal masculine model, both physically and socially, for the younger generation of boys and men who faced uncertain economic, political, and cultural circumstances in the city of Lagos. Although it cannot be denied that British colonial sporting regimes built on and at times transformed Nigerian masculinity, masculine ideals, and gender relations in dynamic urban contexts, a study of boxing demonstrates how Nigerians actively modified gender models for their own uses. The British sporting ethos of discipline, character, and tropical health were adapted and transformed by young male
Nigerians, many of whom were bachelors in the city, who used boxing as both a sign of manliness and modernity in the urban environment of Lagos. Either through boxing or by emulating the tough, physical, but gentlemanly demeanor of boxers aided many young Nigerians in attaining social mobility when educational avenues to employment and economic resources were closed to them.

Secondly, boxing’s rise in popularity and importance post-World War II reflects the fusing of nationalism, perceptions of health, and masculinity in urban locals so that the discipline, character, and constitution of the individual was linked to that of the body politic. Using the study of boxing in Lagos this project reveals how boxing stood at the center of political, economic, and social changes taking place during the colonial period, especially after the Second World War. It argues that the Great Depression and WWII were indeed important and transformative periods in Nigerian and African history. The experiences of war, the training of soldiers, and deprivations of depression and wartime created a hyper-masculine urban environment, one where the physicality of boxing was appreciated, desired, and praised. Reflecting both a bottom-up and top-down development, at the same time that young, unmarried, and often unemployed men turned to boxing as an emotional and social outlet to deal with these experiences, officials encouraged boxing as a solution the social problems these experiences created. Thus, while colonial administrators and British expatriates originally brought boxing to Nigeria and encouraged its prevalence for their own purposes, the sport provided a literal space for Nigerians to shape the British sporting ethos into a Nigerian conceptual framework. Lagosian boxers imbued the sport with their own styles and personalities, creating a uniquely Nigerian sporting culture.
Third, this work also adds a dimension to the history of the “Black Atlantic” circuit as understood by Paul Gilroy. In addition to the music and literature that Gilroy highlighted in his study, boxing also served as a conduit through which people, ideas, and identities could travel, impacting conceptions of race. Nigerian boxers abroad like Hogan Bassey brought Nigeria to the attention of international communities at a time when Nigeria was looking for world recognition and in need of an international beacon. Weekly accounts of the travails of Nigerian boxers abroad posted in the Lagosian newspapers not only inspired others to box, but they also made readers aware of their growing presence on the international stage.

Lastly, I argue that the sport of boxing can be a useful lens with which to view another angle of the nationalist movement during the 1950s in Nigeria. The commentary during the buildup and aftermath of Bassey’s world championship victory reveals deep-seated anxiety over the readiness of Nigeria for political independence in the face of increased tribalism and ethnic tension. Bassey’s victory at the World Featherweight Championship in 1957 heralded boxing as a sport that shaped men into disciplined, healthy citizens with the proper character needed to make Nigeria strong after independence.

A Note on Sources and Methodology

Boxing as a sport cuts across class, gender, and racial lines and by the end of colonialism, boxing was one of the most celebrated and popular sports in Nigeria, enjoyed by people on all levels of society. Yet, boxing was also a controversial sport,

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and because people debated whether it was a good tool by which to develop the nation, there was a lot at stake with the continuation of the sport. Because discussion about the future of the nation and sports in general took place in the public arena, so too did discourse about boxing. The public nature of this discourse and its connection to the fate of the nation makes newspaper reports - the primary channels through which this discourse took place - essential. Oral histories and archival government records serve to supplement and offer different perspectives on events, but newspapers captured the enthusiasm of the public and changes in the way people saw boxing and its usefulness to the state.

Although the newspapers vary in how they detail the sport, there tends to be two types of reports. The most basic type offers a straightforward account of the matches themselves, providing information about the individual contests, tournaments, the results, the people who participated, and upcoming matches. They often provide play-by-play details about the matches and the skills of the boxers. These reports are significant because they reveal the growing number of boxing matches in Lagos over the decades and the physical characteristics of the boxers who participated, and by providing the names, pictures, and descriptions of their boxing style, offer insight into the personalities of the boxers. Public opinion pieces about the place and role of boxing in society represent the second type of newspaper report about boxing. These reports clearly demonstrate that boxers were perceived as and represented much more than athletes. The conflicting views of boxing reflect the fact that not merely the fate of a sport was at stake, but the future of the entire nation. Since many authors of these pieces responded to each other, these reports may be read as a conversation. Changes
in the tone and vocabulary of these pieces represent a gauge by which to measure the underlying anxiety about masculinity, political development, and the place of Nigeria on the world stage.

Beyond boxing, newspaper reports describing political and economic developments provide context for changing views of the sport. Lagosian newspapers point the influence that Liverpool and the British Boxing Board of Control had on the growth and development of Nigerian boxing. Moreover, reports indicate an economic connection between Liverpool and Lagos that facilitated and was in turn impacted by the ascendancy of boxing in Nigeria. Furthermore, newspaper reports from Liverpool demonstrate how Nigerians were viewed from the outside, as well as how visiting Nigerian boxers shaped images and representations of Nigeria and black bodies in Britain.

Although newspaper reports offer insight into the public perception of boxing and boxers, they tend to sensationalize facts and focus on aspects that might garner the most attention from their reader base. Furthermore, although boxers and managers were often quoted, they rarely offered their own perspective. Consequently, the perception that newspaper reports offer is often distorted and one-sided. To counteract this skewed view and help fill in the gaps of information that the newspaper reports left behind, I conducted forty interviews with former boxers, managers, club officials, coaches, trainers, spectators, and administrators and their family members. The oral histories that I gathered allow for a closer look at the reality of the situation, getting beyond the often heroic image that many of the newspaper accounts present to see why and how boxing mattered to individuals. Furthermore, these oral histories relay
different geographical perspectives since I was able to record the memories of Liverpudlians as well as Lagosians.

Finally, while newspaper reports and oral histories offer essential insight into the popular view of boxing and its role in the development of Nigeria, these sources lack information about the government’s approach to the sport. Due to the political significance of boxing, it is essential to understand how it influenced or was influenced by official policy. The collection of government documents at the Nigerian National Archives in Lagos indicates that boxing as a sport was not a major problem for colonial authorities or linked heavily to racial supremacy and apartheid, like it was in Southern Rhodesia or South Africa. As a result, boxing shows up in governmental records indirectly. For example, they reveal that the government responded to the problem of juvenile delinquency by encouraging amateur boxing and access to sporting equipment and space. Of course, the inherent weakness of these records is that boxing is not the center of the story, and they do not discuss the triumphs and experiences of the boxers themselves. Instead, they describe the ideals and ideas of the colonial administration, social welfare officers, British expatriates, and foreign companies. Consequently, the various sources—newspapers, oral histories, and government records—work together, balancing out the weakness of each to form a more

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complete picture of boxing in early twentieth-century Nigeria and its role in the development of the nation and its citizens.

**Contextualizing Boxing in African and Nigerian Historiography**

Nigerian scholars have been slow to use sport as an analytical tool for historical analysis, and have tended to look more at leisure and labor. Karin Barber’s work on popular arts in Africa has spawned several works that detail the impact of colonialism on movies, literature, plays, songs, and dances. Since popular arts were widespread and flourished within the colonial situation at different times and places, often without the involvement of colonial oversight and sometimes in defiance of them, their importance to African society was undeniable. Focusing on those arts and how people consumed them, be they football, music, or movies, opens a door to what she deemed as African experience not found through the archives. Barber also contended that sport was another important avenue for popular arts during colonialism.\(^4\) Nigerian sports history is a relatively new field of inquiry with several works based on various sports published in the last decade or so.\(^5\) Recently, Nigerian historians have used sport primarily to look at nationalism and nation building, urbanization, and politics. This dissertation builds on and compliments these recent studies, but also moves the discussion of sport onto masculinity and how sport impacted conceptions of manliness and masculine behavior.

As previously mentioned, this dissertation seeks to fill the gap in scholarship concerning the development and role of sports in Africa, and particularly Nigeria, by


offering an examination of boxing in Lagos and its connection to the identity and political
development of the nation and its citizens. To do so, I will adopt and adapt the
approaches that scholars have applied to other aspects of leisure and sports and other
African nations while also acknowledging the unique factors within Nigeria and its
relationship to the British Empire that shaped Nigerian perception, enjoyment,
employment, and performance of boxing.

This study will adopt and adapt the approach of Akyeampong and Ambler, who
use leisure as a window into the everyday lives of Africans. These scholars argue that
an examination of leisurely activities, including movies, radio, music, drinking, dancing,
and sport, serve to expand the scope and understanding of African popular culture and
the realities of life under colonialism in ways that histories looking exclusively at labor
and politics cannot reach.6 By looking at the larger trajectory of boxing’s diffusion within
society and how Nigerians participated both as boxers and spectators, it is possible to
gain a clearer picture of how Nigerians adapted a sport introduced by the colonial
government for their own ends. A focus on the history of boxing provides insight beyond
the British civilizing mission to the goals, aspirations, and experiences of Nigerians
themselves.

Laura Fair focuses Akyeampong and Ambler’s approach within the context of
Zanzibar, using sports as a lens by which to see how men within a colonial setting
shaped an independent national identity and gained political agency. Fair argues that

6 See Emmanuel Akyeampong and Charles Ambler, “Leisure in African History: An Introduction,” The
1-16, 2. Also T. O. Ranger, Dance and Society in Eastern Africa, 1890-1970: The Beni Ngoma (London:
Heinemann Educational, 1975), 2. Ranger further argued that “the origins, development, and diffusion of
certain elements in popular culture in colonial eastern Africa” can “throw light on some of the realities of
the colonial situation.” The same applies for Nigeria, as this dissertation will show.
pastimes and politics are not mutually distinct categories; they are, in fact, intimately connected and cannot be separated. Moreover, she demonstrates that although the colonial administrators wrote the rules of games and brought them to Africa, they had no control over how Africans played the game or the meanings men assigned to sports. In this sense Fair takes the connection between sport and politics a step further and shows how this emerging discourse also influenced concepts of masculinity in Zanzibar. Sport was an important site for men to assert their manliness and in turn, shape and reshape conceptions of masculinity. Fair’s approach encourages awareness of how people under colonial rule negotiated room to assert their own ideas and values. Similarly, in his analysis of boxing in South Africa, Tyler Fleming demonstrates how people living under colonial rule used the sport to gain autonomy over their own identities. He argues that boxing developed as “an avenue to uplift the black race. Boxing was believed to promote ideals of civility, discipline, respectability, independence, and self-defense, all considered necessary by many in order for Africans to survive in the urban setting of the Rand.”

The approach advocated by Fair and Fleming makes it possible to access the ways in which Nigerians utilized boxing to shape a unique political identity separate from that imposed by colonial rule and shaped concepts of masculinity and, more specifically, the model male citizen. Boxing for

7 Laura Fair, *Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Community, and Identity in Post-Abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890-1945* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), especially chapter five. For example, men would get together at the latest football matches and discuss and argue sports. But their conversations would also include political debates and economic considerations. Leisure pursuits, argues Fair, provided an acceptable arena to challenge the existing social order.


9 Fleming, "’Now the African Reigns Supreme,’" 47.
Nigerians created a space through which people could participate in a discourse about the attributes of the ideal male citizen needed to create a strong, healthy state.

As this study will examine boxing within a specific urban area—Lagos—Phyllis Martin’s work on football in colonial Brazzaville is particularly useful. Martin focuses on sports to explore the connection between leisure and colonial urban development. In this manner, she presents sport as a multifaceted window through which the historian may view “the interplay of culture and political life.”¹⁰ It was in the city that people felt colonial power most intensely, and it was in the city that these same people most visibly contested that power. The present work will adopt Martin’s case study approach to better understand the connections between leisure, politics, and boxing in Lagos. There are some key similarities between the two cities: Brazzaville and Lagos were both economic and political centers for their respective colonies. In addition, debates over football in newspapers reflected larger concerns in Brazzaville, a phenomenon echoed in Lagos, where social, political, and sports worlds were intertwined, particularly after World War II.

This study seeks to adapt the approaches described above to better understand and elucidate the role that boxing played in the development of Nigeria as a nation and the shaping of a Nigerian identity on both the domestic and international stage. Perhaps more importantly, this study seeks to build on the awareness that these studies have generated about the contributions that the nations of African have made not only within their own states but to the wider world. It is my hope that a study on the connection

between sports, politics, and masculinity in Nigeria will further the integration of African history into the existing global history.

Boxing as Nigerian History

Nigeria was not alone in Africa in adopting boxing, but the social, political, and economic circumstances gives the development and use of the sport there a unique flavor. While the approaches described above may be adapted to a study about boxing in Nigeria, it is not possible to apply an argument about boxing elsewhere in Africa to the situation in Lagos. The specific role that boxing played in Nigerian politics and gender as the colony moved along its path towards independence evidences the need to consider each nation separately. The unique colonial histories, locations, and role on the international scene of each state guided how they understood and adapted sports. It is necessary to recognize the agency that the people of each African state had in the tools they adopted to shape a political voice and identity.

There have been five works published over the last 25 years that deal with the history of boxing in particular African nations, all of which focus on the time period prior to World War II. Each has brought important insight into how boxing can be a beneficial lens with which to view colonialism, but it is not possible to apply their analysis of boxing to the particular circumstances of Nigeria wholly. Two of these studies concern the white settler colony of Southern Rhodesia, and because Nigeria

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was not such a colony, the practice and development of boxing in Nigeria differ dramatically since racial concerns were not paramount. Noting that boxing was a British cultural transplant, the other studies concerning boxing in African nations look for precolonial African sport equivalents in order to better explain why people flocked to a foreign cultural import. For example, Emmanuel Akyeampong has traced the origins of boxing to the earlier practice of Ghanaian wrestling to show that one flowed into the other because of the similarities involved.\(^\text{12}\) The transition, as viewed by Akyeampong, was smooth, as boxing replaced wrestling without much difficulty because it represented a continuation and adaptation of precolonial wrestling, preserving the institutions of the wrestling while adapting to the changing colonial situation.\(^\text{13}\)

While Akyeampong’s argument fits within the context of colonial Ghana, circumstances in Nigeria did not permit such a neat and tidy transition. Consequently, it is not possible to make a universal argument about sports, and more specifically about the transition from wrestling to boxing.\(^\text{14}\) In fact, unlike boxing in Ghana, boxing in Nigeria was not a popular enterprise for Nigerians until the interwar years, nearly 30 years after colonial rule was established. While wrestling was (and still is) an established sport in Nigeria, boxing was not intended to replace wrestling as administrators tried to do in the Ghanaian case. Amateur boxing in Nigeria was

\(^\text{12}\) Akyeampong, “Bukom.”

\(^\text{13}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{14}\) See John Blacking, “Games and Sport in Pre-Colonial African Societies” in William Baker and J.A. Mangan (eds). Sport in Africa: Essays in Social History (New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1987). Some groups, like the Edo, saw boxing as the European version of wrestling into the 1990s. However, during the colonial period, the majority of peoples that came to Lagos did not see boxing as similar to wrestling in any way. Interview with “Keepright” Osabayo, Lagos, June 2012.
introduced partly as a colonial response to urbanization, fears of Nigerian
detribalization, and the increase of urban juvenile delinquency. Officials believed that
boxing would assist in the integration of European ideals of discipline and help troubled
youth become useful members of society. Boxing was not established to reform or
reshape wrestling. In fact, the word for boxing in Yoruba is boxing, while the word for
wrestling is *gídígbò*. It was truly an urban phenomenon disconnected from indigenous
traditions.

Rather than presuming that a development that occurred in one colonial nation
also occurred identically in Nigeria, it is essential to listen to the voices of Nigerians
themselves as they explain, debate, and define boxing in newspapers and oral
interviews. The immediate assumption that boxing is either a colonial influence or a pre-
colonial practice robs Nigerians living under colonial rule of any agency to shape their
own experiences and lives. Boxers fought for various reasons, and by widening the
scope of analysis we can see the myriad ways that colonialism, urbanization, sporting
traditions, British sporting cultures, ideals of modernity, needs for cash, ideas of fame,
anger at parental authority, or learning how to protect oneself in a dangerous city
impacted young men’s decisions to fight.

Nigeria also represents a unique case because it is the only African nation to
produce a world boxing champion prior to the end of colonialism. Akyeampong argues
that Afro-American Heavyweight Champion boxers like Jack Johnson and Joe Louis
were central figures of the Black Atlantic, shaping ideas of masculinity and power in
colonial Ghana. This study on boxing in Nigeria, however, demonstrates that Nigerian

15 Akyeampong, “Bukom.”
boxers also significantly influenced perceptions of black bodies in the Black Atlantic. It was not solely American or British boxers who stood as archetypes for the modern man and challenged stereotypes, but also Nigerian boxers. Looking at the unique circumstances that influenced Nigerian boxers also demonstrates how Nigeria, more so than any other African nation, participated in international discussions about race, gender, and the place of colonial peoples within the empire through the boxing ring.\footnote{Gilroy, \textit{Black Atlantic}.}

While it is necessary to recognize the circumstances that made boxing and its uses in Nigeria different from any other nation, it is also important not to carry this emphasis to an extreme. This study hopes to balance the study of Nigeria’s particularities with the recognition that some of those particularities were connected to or shaped by world-wide events that effected nearly every African state. This is particularly the case with World War II. While participation and responses different among the African nations, this event influenced changes in each. This point is particularly significant within the context of colonization and the shift to independence. As Frederick Cooper notes, decolonization was not a tidy or periodical break in African history and treating it as such hides as much as it reveals.\footnote{See Frederick Cooper, \textit{Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 4.} An analysis of boxing in Nigeria demonstrates that World War II actually represents a truer epochal break that radically transformed colonial society. Thus, by examining boxing within a specific Nigerian context, I will attempt to point to events and developments that influenced and responded to situations within the individual nation, as well as those that impacted Nigeria and the other states of the continent collectively.
Boxing and Masculinity

This study uses Lindsay and Miescher's definition of masculinity to include “a cluster of norms, values, and behavioral patterns expressing explicit or implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others.”\textsuperscript{18} Masculinity is a cultural and historical concept, whose meanings are continually contested and shaped through existing power relations as well as larger socioeconomic, cultural, and religious changes. As Craig Heron notes, “Masculinity is best seen as a complex expression of male practices, consciousness, and cultural representation developed in specific contexts in constant interaction with subjects gendered as female and with other men (and boys).”\textsuperscript{19} Using these descriptions, this dissertation argues that the growth of boxing was one such cultural representation of male expression that developed in the context of post WWII Africa, complete with its own cluster of norms, behaviors, and values.

Masculinity is different, but not altogether divorced from, manhood. While masculinity is more abstract, manhood refers to the physiological. While Lindsay and Miescher see adulthood as one of the prime ways men exhibited manhood, this study adds to this idea by showing how young men adapted this to urban areas and used their bodies to express their own ideals of manhood, with attributes such as power, aggression, courage, and muscles, which were young men’s perception of adulthood in the city. It is important to remember that masculinity – and femininity for that matter – is

\textsuperscript{18} Miescher and Lindsay, \textit{Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa} (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003), 4.

\textsuperscript{19} Craig Heron, “Boys Will Be Boys: Working-Class Masculinities in the Age of Mass Production,” \textit{International Labor and Working-Class History} 69: Working-Class Subjectivities and Sexualities (Spring, 2006), pp. 6-34, 7.
not merely constructed but also produced. Boxing allows us to see several ways that Nigerian men expressed, performed, and displayed their manhood, muscles, and masculinity in the public sphere.

Boxing in Nigeria as a unit of historical analysis also sheds light on other forms of masculinity not visible through the prism of labor. As Kristin Mann has shown, gender relations and masculinity in Lagos, especially among the elite and educated, had experienced a period of transition starting in the early 1900s. Yet Nigeria in the post-World War II era, as Lisa Lindsey notes, saw some of the most dramatic changes within these spheres. Lindsey has argued that masculinity in postwar Nigeria was heavily tied up with European conceptions of the male “breadwinner,” something foreign to Yoruba men since before colonialism women were known for their ability to make money, trade, and contribute to the family. After the war, Nigerian men demanded “breadwinner” status and pay. For Lindsay, gender (and the male breadwinner) was as much performative as it was flexible: men and women “worked with gender” by acting in particular ways, working with existing masculinities and adapting foreign ones. Furthermore, men began to define their manhood, as Carolyn Brown also noticed, through wage labor and their ability to finance social obligations and kin patronage.

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20 Miescher and Lindsay, *Men and Masculinities*, 7.


all three cases, Mann, Lindsey, and Brown focus their studies on the elite and middle-class populations of urban Lagos or Enugu, whose access to money, education, and jobs made them the minority in Nigerian cities.

While the existing scholarship points to a conclusive form of Nigerian Masculinity, it focusses on the employed, married population, and it is undeniable that their experience in the colonial system differed greatly from those who gravitated towards and participated in boxing: employed bachelors, the unemployed, and unmarried young men and boys. Lindsay notes that even by 1950, only 15% of Lagos’ wage earning population (30,554 wage earners) were engaged in some form of railway labor.25 With a population of over 265,000 in 1950, wage earners made up only 11% of Lagos’ population, and over 67% of the population were below the age of 30.26 The employed population’s access to jobs, money, and patronage certainly gave them a special space to shape what they believed were the ideals of modern urban males. But they were not the only ones trying to express their masculinity or attain manhood in the city. What did the rest do? How did those without a British education, colonial civil service jobs, or salaried labor define and shape their masculinity? This study uses boxing to shed light on the masculine code employed by this often overlooked population. It suggests that boxing provided a voice to some of the most marginalized people in the city (the unemployed, juvenile delinquents, young dependent men) and allowed them both an expression of manhood as well as a means for social mobility. Their rejection of elite


and middle-class masculinity, of which the majority of Lagosians did not ascribe to or could claim due to lack of social connections and jobs, meant that urban masculinity was more multifaceted than previously thought. Boxing allows us to see the unique way that these young Nigerians expressed their manhood in the urban city.

Although Lindsey focuses her study on a small segment of the population, she does look at the role of sport in the gendering of the Nigerian and Lagosian public sphere into a masculine space. This space permitted the building of patronage relationships through trade organizations, ethnic associations, and also through workers’ sports teams. As Lindsey argues, “Men’s employment, in this case, gave them access to certain types of leisure activities, which in turn facilitated links to public and political networks.” Yet, more than being an avenue for building political and public networks, sport associations helped “participants and spectators to imagine their national and work-based communities while forming part of a distinct masculine public sphere.” This present work builds on this insight to show that the gendering of public space as male was also a product of the masculinities that emerged from the boxing rings: the bachelor subculture of masculinity and “Muscular Citizenship,” which relied heavily on the display of maleness in the public sphere.

I define “Muscular Citizenship” as the melding of nationalism with manhood, creating an expectation that proper citizens had to be, first and foremost, healthy men.

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27 Lindsay, *Working with Gender*.


29 Ibid.
with outstanding character and discipline. The post WWII changes in Lagos meant that a significant segment of the population became young males focused on making money and achieving upward social mobility, and they influenced the gendering of public space, which became male-centric, based on physicality and masculine aggression. This new, urban culture encouraged, and was encouraged by, the growing popularity of cowboy movies, bars and nightclubs, “edgy” music, a new type of market literature (Onitsha Literature or chapbooks) that motivated a can-do attitude, and especially for this study, sport and sports clubs. I argue that because boxing was an important feature of the growing link between masculinity, nationalism, and health, it represents an important lens through which to examine the emergence of a new urban masculinity that I call Muscular Citizenship.

Underpinning Muscular Citizenship was the bachelor subculture of masculinity which emerged out of the experiences of migrant youth and young men in urban Lagos. Bachelorhood is, as Craig Heron points out, one aspect of the “childhood – bachelorhood – breadwinner” life cycle.30 Before a man embraced the breadwinner ideal, boys had to learn to be men and “masculine” through a variety of conflicting and contradictory means, like “home, school, street, work place, and pleasure site.”31 It was through the centrality of the body that youth and working-class men expressed their pride, met social demands, and measured achievement in sports and work.32 Youth subcultures, according to Katie Mooney, can be defined as small assemblies, usually

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30 Heron, “Boys Will Be Boys.”
31 Ibid, 6-7.
32 Ibid.
informal, focused around “a common set of interests which serve to unify the members whilst simultaneously differentiating them from wider and usually more 'mainstream' social groups.”

Age and generational concerns unite and play a role in the composition of the membership. The intense economic competition, crowded living conditions, poverty, and growing sports culture of the post WWII colonial city created the conditions for the development of a bachelor subculture of boxing based on the aggressive displays of violence and sporting prowess of the sport which in turn impacted youthful public displays of manhood and ideals of masculinity. The creation of the Boys’ Clubs Movement by Donald Faulkner and his promotion of amateur boxing in his spare time, an initiative directed at the unemployed and unmarried youth flooding Lagos, proved to colonial authorities and Nigerian elites that boxing could produce “good results,” instill much needed “discipline,” and forge strong “character” for all youths, turning them into proper citizens AND men – an argument which became foundational for Muscular Citizenship.

Boxing became an important tool by which to make citizens and men, on which the success of the nation depended. It is important to make the distinction that although the bachelor subculture was the backbone of Muscular Citizenship, not all who ascribed to Muscular Citizenship were in fact bachelors. This subculture of boxing challenged and imitated other Nigerian masculinities while impacting the ideals of Muscular Citizenship.

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34 Ibid.

Chapter Descriptions

Chapter 2 discusses the beginnings of the urban sporting culture in Lagos that adopted boxing after World War II. This happened because of the transfer of several important cultural factors into Nigerian society: The British Public Schoolboy culture of sport and education, ideals of Tropical Medicine and the strong sporting male body, and a new wave of colonial administrators, expatriates, and missionary/educators that were also enthusiastic sportsmen and sportswomen. I argue that in order to understand the post-WWII adoption of boxing in Nigeria, one must understand the British sporting culture that came along with colonial administrators to the colonies. The ideals and ethos of sport were easily adapted and adopted by Nigerians because sport itself was not novel to Nigeria or Nigerians, just the specific British versions. The British came to Nigeria with conceptions of sport, health, and character that took time to disseminate to Nigerians. The most important site of this transfer during the interwar period was in Nigerian schools. The British tried to implant their ideals of the masculine body onto Nigerian males, but their attempts were met with ambivalence and in most cases rejection. Boxing failed to catch on as a popular sport for general audiences during this time, but as Chapter 2 argues, the seeds from British sporting culture were planted.

The economic and social circumstances of Lagos during this time created an environment that encouraged the sport’s success after the war. Chapter 3 examines two Nigerian sportsmen, newspaper entrepreneur and future President Nnamdi “Zik” Azikiwe and boxing great Reginald “Thunderbolt” Williams, to explain how the exigencies of the Great Depression paved the way for the establishment and growth of boxing in colonial Nigeria. Specifically, it suggests that 1936 was a turning point for boxing in the colony for three reasons. First, newspapers’ coverage of boxing increased
thanks to the Azikiwe’s *West African Pilot*, which started circulation in 1937 and promoted boxing as a worthwhile sport for Nigerians. Second, at this time Reggie Williams emerged as the example of the well-shaped, strong men that boxing produced, which encouraged other Nigerians to take up the sport. Third, the intercolonial tournament against the Gold Coast in 1938 focused popular attention and linked boxing to the strength and progress of Nigeria as a nation. The efforts of Azikiwe and Williams brought the seeds planted by the British, as discussed in Chapter 2, to fruition. The cultural issues of character, sportsmanship, and health came together in the sport of boxing for a general audience. Lastly, the chapter looks at how these connections were carried over during WWII, focusing particularly on the way boxing was promoted during the war and how the link was forged between the sport and national pride.

Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6 detail the different ways that the Second World War impacted colonial Lagos and opened a space for the sport of boxing to thrive and ultimately to become the representative sport for the articulation and celebration of nationalism. Chapter 4 looks at the immediate postwar situation in Lagos, and how the war ushered in a new era for boxing in the colony along with a unique style of boxing that contemporaries at the time called the “new school.” This chapter argues that WWII was indeed an important watershed moment in colonial Nigeria, the impact of which should not be underestimated. Postwar Lagos melded together the prewar ideas of sport, health, and character with the experiences of war and subsequently saw the creation of professional boxing in the colony. This shift in boxing mirrors larger changes within Lagosian society prompted by the influx of male migrants and the return of soldiers who had participated in a masculine, sporting culture. This chapter discusses
the gendering of public space as male-centric and the development of a masculine urban culture infused by new popular entertainment such as films and novels, as previously mentioned. It also discusses the development of the professional boxing sport, a process marked by the creation of a board of control in Nigeria. In this analysis, boxing represents both a lens by which to examine the intersection of masculinity, nationalism, and health and the popular phenomenon that served to bring these components together. The product of this junction was a new urban masculinity that I denominate “Muscular Citizenship.”

While professional boxing found near immediate success after WWII, amateur boxing, with its focus on the love of the sport, sportsmanship, and no monetary prizes, was slower in developing as a strong, popular movement. Chapter 5 analyzes the growth of amateur boxing in Lagos and the concurrent emergence of a bachelor subculture of masculinity that at times meshed with, and at other times rejected, the Muscular Citizenship created through professional boxing. This chapter examines the development of amateur boxing through the figure of Donald Faulkner, the first colonial Social Welfare Officer in West Africa, who helped to establish the British-born Boys’ Club Movement in Nigeria to reform juvenile delinquents. This movement used amateur boxing as a way to discipline youth and mold them into urban African “gentlemen” and to instill in them the proper “character”. In this manner, Faulkner was indirectly instrumental in the creation of a bachelor subculture of boxing that was further encouraged by cultural imports like American “cowboy” and boxing movies from Britain and America. This bachelor subculture of boxing both challenged and imitated elite
Nigerian masculinities by praising toughness, strength, style, and courage and using boxing to try to circumvent traditional avenues to the accumulation of resources.

Chapter 6 looks at an important aspect of the popularization of boxing in Lagos and the formation of a Nigerian identity: the visible success of Nigerian boxers in England as both role models and projections of “Nigeria” internationally. This chapter argues that this success occurred due to the economic connection between Liverpool, England and Lagos, the passing of the British Nationality Act in June of 1948 that loosened travel restrictions for persons born in the Empire, and the victory of Dick Turpin, a British-born Black, who shattered the British colour bar on boxing titles. These events encouraged Nigerians to travel and fight for Empire Titles, and they opened the door for Liverpudlian Peter Banasko as a manager and trainer. The chapter then looks at the impact that Nigerian boxers had on the city of Liverpool and how that success radiated through the newspaper reports in Lagos and Nigeria at large, instilling an awareness of Nigerians’ place on the international stage. Looking at this aspect of Nigerian boxing history allows one to see its importance to independence, masculinity, and national identity.

Chapter 7 looks at the death in the ring of Dapo “Homicide” Ilori and the subsequent debate that took place in Lagos over the desirability of boxing in the colony. The discussion printed by newspaper commenters about boxing underscored a larger discourse about the social and political goals of Nigeria to be cultivating men, shaping ideal Nigerian citizens, and establishing the independent nation in the international eye. When read contextually, apprehension about boxing was in part a response to larger social issues such as the Kano Riots in 1953, the breakdown of the 1950 MacPherson
Constitution, and the improper education of young boys who would one day control the nation. Taken together, this chapter suggests that the debate about the legitimacy of boxing reflected Nigerians’ conceptualization of, and anxiety about, shaping an ideal nation and ideal masculine citizens as it prepared first for self-government and later for full independence.

Chapter 8 is the final chapter, and it examines the implications of Hogan “Kid” Bassey’s victory and his ascension to the top of the boxing world in 1957. It argues that Bassey figured centrally in the conceptualization of Nigeria as a nation ready for independence and equal to others on the world stage. To understand the importance of this moment in Nigerian history, however, we must take a step back and put the victory into context. As discussed in Chapter 7, people were unsure of the benefit of boxing for the future of the nation after the death of “Homicide” Dapo Ilori in 1953. Yet, when Bassey won the British Empire Featherweight Title just two years later, and then claimed the World Featherweight Title in 1957, it became clear that boxing would remain a central part of Nigerian culture and identity. Bassey’s success affirmed boxing’s essential role in creating gentlemanly citizens and reforming juvenile delinquents into proper men needed to shape and guide an emerging nation. In addition, his victories encouraged the evolution of masculinity from the Muscular Citizenship described in Chapter 4 to the “Muscular Gentleman.” Finally, the fact that Bassey became the World Featherweight champion in 1957, the same year as the London Conference that outlined the new “Independence Constitution” for Nigeria, reinforced the perceived good that boxing did for the country. Bassey’s victories
mirrored the growing perception that the nation was ready for independence and had achieved political and cultural equality on the world’s stage.

Boxing provides a window into the development of a national Nigerian identity during the last years of colonialism, the euphoria and anxiety people felt about independence, and efforts required to create a nation. Moreover, boxing as a unit of historical analysis offer access to a better understanding of urban living: how people interacted, worked, played, and grappled with dramatic changes happening around them. It sheds light on the growth of a bachelor subculture in response to rapid urban growth that, in turn, spawned the development of alternate yet complimentary forms of masculinity and manliness. Finally, boxing became an arena through which Nigeria emerged on the world scene. This dissertation seeks to highlight the important role that the thousands of Nigerian boxers who entered rings in Lagos and beyond in the first half of the twentieth century played in the history of Nigeria, the British Empire, and the Black Atlantic. Their recorded stories and experiences as well as those of the audience who watched, listened, and read about boxing matches with nervous anticipation reveal a more complex understanding of multiple levels of African and Nigerian history.
CHAPTER 2
LAGOS, SCHOOLING, AND MANLINESS BEFORE WORLD WAR TWO

“Lagos Was Not a Typical Nineteenth Century Yoruba Town”

Boxing came to Nigeria after the First World War, but it took almost three decades of work by Nigerian and British sporting fans to make boxing a legitimate enterprise that was popular and useful for Nigerians in colonial society. Unlike the Gold Coast, present-day Ghana, where boxing grafted easily onto indigenous ideals of masculinity and social standing, Nigerians were not quick to take to boxing.¹ In fact, many Nigerians throughout the time period of this study saw boxing as nothing more than a brutal sport with little to no social value.² Although the British had been present in Lagos since the mid-nineteenth century, the promotion and expansion of sport and sporting facilities was slow to develop beyond horse racing and cricket for Europeans, and European football (soccer) for Nigerians before WWII. This space between the advent of colonialism in Nigeria and the apex of boxing’s popularity in the late 1950s begs several questions. Why did it take so long for boxing to gain prominence in Nigeria while it took hold rather quickly in the Gold Coast, especially if, as argued by other scholars, boxing was simply adopted as an extension of indigenous wrestling culture? What changes occurred under colonial rule during the twentieth century that made boxing more appealing for young men to engage in?


This chapter focuses on the changing social and educational landscape of Lagos towards the end of the interwar period, which created a space for boxing to be immensely popular in the post-WWII era. This chapter begins with a brief introduction of the topography and population of Lagos and looks at British city planning of Lagos Island after annexation in 1861. It then moves onto an overview of the British athletic schoolboy culture, which emphasized health, “character,” and “pluck,” and the effect that it had on the selection of colonial administrators for tropical Africa, especially those that came to Nigeria and Lagos. This brief introduction to British sporting culture helps to understand the language and ethos of sport in Nigeria throughout the colonial period, as well as the fascination of British and elite Nigerians with character development through sports in school. It was through schools that British sporting culture was primarily transmitted to colonial subjects, along with British attitudes about health, sport, and the European body. During this period, these ideals were placed onto African bodies, and through schooling and sport the ethos of health and character became paramount to the colonial government and missionary schooling of Nigerians. The school systems set up in Nigeria modeled the British “House System” schools in order to foster character and discipline, while the relocation of Nigerians was part of sanitizing the island. Although boxing did not become popular during this time period, it is important to understand these ideas and currents that circulated in Lagos before WWII, as they formed the backbone of sporting institutions in the country generally, and after 1936, boxing in particular (see Chapter 3).
Growth of Lagos and British Presence

During the nineteenth century, Lagos was the principle slave port of the Bight of Benin.\(^3\) It was a fishing village settled by migrant peoples during the sixteenth century, and through intermarriage, trade, and warfare, the community eventually was more permanently established on the northwestern point of the island.\(^4\) The expanding slave trade dramatically changed the size and nature of the island. As several scholars have noted, while slavery continued into the mid-nineteenth century, the desire of the British to stamp out the slave trade in the region, as well as the allure of profit from legal trade, led to the British annexing the city of Lagos in 1861.\(^5\) By the mid-1850s, refugees, mostly slaves from the Fulani Jihad of 1804 and the various Yoruba Wars of the nineteenth century, swelled the population of Lagos with a motley community of Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo.\(^6\) The former slaves began taking refuge in Lagos because of its distance from the wars and the promise of freedom offered by the British, but also the simple defensibility of the island meant it would be harder to be recaptured.\(^7\) As Kristin Mann argues, the rapid population growth after the Yoruba wars flooded Lagos with

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“strangers” who competed economically with the original inhabitants. She also notes that Lagos was unlike other colonial Yoruba towns and cities in Nigeria because its inhabitants entered into the new colonial economy as traders, not producers.

Lagos at first referred to the small island in the Lagos Lagoon that spanned one and half miles from north to south and just over three miles from the east to west. At the start of British colonial rule, Lagos was a small fishing village that was home to roughly 25,000 people in 1866, covering roughly 1.55 square miles of the island. By the turn of the twentieth century, Lagos was still a relatively small island with a small local population of approximately 40,000. Unlike other Yoruba towns nearby, Lagos was a polyglot population, drawing migrants since the mid-nineteenth century. Growth in trade leading up to World War One fueled a new massive wave of migration from the hinterland, and by 1911 there were over 72,000 residents, nearly doubling the population in a decade. By then, Lagos had overgrown its island and metropolitan

8 Mann, *Marrying Well*, 17. Those Yoruba or other Nigerians that came to Lagos and were not part of the lineage of the ruling Obas were considered strangers, but the demarcation was fluid. Many traders or others that came to Lagos through marriage and wealth were able to either join existing lineages of power on the island or create their own.

9 Ibid., 16.

10 Lagos is a Portuguese word meaning “Lagoon” and was first coined by Portuguese sailors in the 18th century. Mabogunje, *Urbanization in Nigeria*, 238-245.


12 Ibid.


14 Ibid.
Lagos now consisted of Iddo Island to the west and the former communities of Ebute Metta and Apapa on the mainland, a total of eighteen square miles.\textsuperscript{15}

The British wanted to extend legitimate commerce into the interior as well as end the slave trade, and found an opportunity to extend their influence into the interior when they brokered a peace treaty to end the Yoruba Civil Wars of 1877-86.\textsuperscript{16} With the military defeat of Ijebu in 1892, Britain’s Lagos colony extended its right to govern over the Yoruban Protectorate. As Mabogunje notes, by focusing multiple existing trade routes through Lagos, the growth of export trade between 1862 and 1900 grew fourteen times, while imports also increased ten times over the same period.\textsuperscript{17} Lagos grew in importance again in 1906 when the city was fused with the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, creating the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria with Lagos as its capital.\textsuperscript{18} The expansion and consolidation of British rule over much of Northern Nigeria, facilitated by the completion of several railroads to Ibadan (1885), Abeokuta (1889), and Kano (1912), led to the amalgamation of the Protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria into one colony, again with Lagos as the capital, in 1914.\textsuperscript{19} Despite this, the British population in Lagos remained rather small, just over 250 at the end of the

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. and Mabogunje, \textit{Urbanization in Nigeria}, 256-259.


\textsuperscript{17} See Mabogunje, \textit{Urbanization in Nigeria}, 246. Exports grew from £62,000 to £885,000 while imports grew from £78,000 to £830,000.

\textsuperscript{18} Bigon, \textit{A History of Urban Planning}, 14; and Mabogunje, \textit{Urbanization in Nigeria}, 248-249.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 14-16. Lagos would remain the capital of Nigeria until 1991 when it was moved to its current location at Abuja.
nineteenth century, meaning the demand for labor in the growing economy needed to be filled by Nigerians, a trend that continued throughout the colonial period.20

The growth of the city as a trade center, replete with docks, wharfs, roads, and railways, meant a continual search for labor by the British. As Saheed Aderinto notes, much of the growth of Lagos' population from the Yoruba hinterland coincided with the infrastructural development of Lagos as men were needed as manual laborers in a variety of works.21 By 1920, Lagos' trade infrastructure in terms of roads, railroads, and the port had dramatically increased, leading to an influx of Nigerians and British to Lagos. As business grew, so did the city.22 At that time, Lagos was the largest single market for the country and possessed the majority of the colony's purchasing power.23 As such, the promise of employment opportunities in Lagos exerted a strong pull for Nigerians from the hinterland, where work was increasingly scarce.24

By the early to mid-1920s, the community had grown beyond the island, and to meet the need for housing for British officials the swampy areas of two other nearby islands, Ikoyi and Victoria, were drained and developed as the principle European areas.25 Even these new, segregated neighborhoods could not compensate for the rapid population growth. In 1921 there were roughly 99,690 persons, and by 1931 the


22 Mabogunje, Urbanization in Nigeria, 251.

23 Ibid., 253.

24 Ibid., 261.

population had risen to well over 126,000, a growth of 27% over the decade.\(^{26}\) The government census projected that Lagos’ actual population was actually much larger, and recorded closer to 178,000 by 1935.\(^ {27}\) Segregation of Europeans was a major factor in the colonizer’s struggle against unsanitary urban conditions in Africa.\(^ {28}\) As such, “native settlement areas” like the older Lagos neighborhoods of Yaba and Apapa grew 98%, and Surulere and Ebute Metta over 68% over the same decade.\(^ {29}\)

So, by the early 1900s, Lagos had five distinct yet permeable neighborhoods. The first was Isale Eko, which was the place of the Oba’s and Lagos’ traditional chiefs. Just to the south of Isale Eko was Olowogbowo, an area granted to Saro (freed slaves) immigrants.\(^ {30}\) Saro immigrants made up what Mann calls the “educated elite” because if their schooling and conversion to Christianity in the schools of Sierra Leone, which allowed many to staff the newly created colonial administration bureaucracy in the late nineteenth century.\(^ {31}\) They were in a better position to take advantage of the new opportunities created by legitimate commerce, property rights, and the rise of the

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\(^{26}\) NAI COMCOL 1 739 - Vol 1 (paperwork leading up to) and Vol 2 (the actual stats) Census 1931 Lagos Colony Population and Statistics

\(^{27}\) Letter of J. Cauchi, Lagos Medical Officer, COMCOL 1 739 - Vol 1 (paperwork leading up to) and Vol 2 (the actual stats) Census 1931 Lagos Colony Population and Statistics


\(^{29}\) NAI COMCOL 1 739 - Vol 1 (paperwork leading up to) and Vol 2 (the actual stats) Census 1931 Lagos Colony Population and Statistics

\(^{30}\) The Saro people were migrants from mostly Sierra Leone that had been once themselves been slaves but of Yoruba or Nigerian origin. They were mostly sold through Lagos in the early part of the nineteenth century, and then captured by slave squadrons patrolling West Africa. Once recaptured from slave vessels, they would be taken to Freetown and educated, with many becoming ministers and Christians. When the British took over Lagos, Saro people found steady employment as clerks, teachers, and officials. George, *Making Modern Girls*, 23. The Saro population first came to Lagos starting approximately in 1852, when the first Yoruba emigrants from Sierra Leone came back, all of whom were victims or descendants of victims of the slave trade. Euba, “Dress and Status,” 143.

colonial state.\textsuperscript{32} Just to the east was the Marina section of town, which became the economic headquarters and business district where one found the banks, customs offices, warehouses, and wharfs.\textsuperscript{33} The Marina also was home to British colonial officials before the reclamation of Ikoyi and Victoria Island, as well as the various churches and their mission schools.\textsuperscript{34}

Further east was the Portuguese section or Popo Town, which became an enclave for former Brazilian slaves, known locally as Amaro, who like the Saro, descended from Nigerians taken into slavery.\textsuperscript{35} Lastly, to the far east of the island, where roughly 70% of the population lived, were the areas known as Epetedo, Lafaji, and Oke Suna. These neighborhoods were home to people who had once migrated from the northern hinterland of Lagos, from places like Abeokuta, Ibadan, and Ijebu, usually without the proper connections or kinship relations to secure land in Isale Eko.\textsuperscript{36}

At the turn of the century, therefore, while the ethnic composition of Lagos was more than 50% Yoruba, of which more than 8 dialects of Yoruba were spoken, Lagos consisted of a heterogeneous population of indigenous Yoruba, immigrant populations

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\textsuperscript{34} The various churches included Wesleyan, Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, and C.M.S. George, \textit{Making Modern Girls}, 24.

\textsuperscript{35} Mann, \textit{Marrying well}, 16. There were an estimated 3000 Amaro in Lagos in 1866. Through trade, intermarriage, and patron-client relationships, Amaro and Saro integrated into Lagosian society, and their shared heritage became less important by the turn of the century.

\textsuperscript{36} George, \textit{Making Modern Girls}, 24.
\end{flushright}
(Saro and Amaro), British, and other Nigerians living in distinct urban areas within the city.  

Even from 1861 before it became the official capital, the British used Lagos as the seat of government and trade in the region and as the base from which they extended their influence into the Yoruba hinterland to the north. Lagos Island was a dangerous place for Europeans to live because of its poor water drainage and low elevation, making it susceptible to diseases such as frequent outbreaks of malaria. As Sir Richard Burton noted in 1863, “The Town of Lagos is certainly one of the most unhealthy spots on these malarious [sic] shores.” Many Europeans shared the image of Lagos as an unhealthy and dangerous place for Europeans as set out by Burton, and in fact the West Coast of Africa was called the “White Man’s Grave.” As Kristin Mann noted, the death rate of Europeans in the nineteenth century in Lagos was five to ten times the national rate in England, allowing Saro and Amaro immigrants to fill positions in the colonial administration due to a lack of British settlers. Burton felt that in order to alleviate the unsanitary conditions, “the natives should be taught, or rather forced, to learn something like purity in their habits.” Even so, Burton predicted that Lagos, “a

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40 Mann, Marrying Well, 15. Mann shows that in England the death rate was roughly 7 per 1000, while in Lagos for young men in at was closer to 71 per 1000.

young and thriving place,” would become a great city in twenty years’ time.\textsuperscript{42} However, as late as the mid-1930s Lagos still had a reputation for uncleanliness and unsanitary conditions and was widely known as a dangerous place for Europeans.\textsuperscript{43}

With the rapid growth of the population outlined above, space on the island was at a premium, and the growing congestion led to unsanitary conditions and epidemic disease.\textsuperscript{44} The British on the island feared what they saw as the unsanitary actions and lifestyles of the Nigerians and other non-Europeans in their midst. Rather than settle on the mainland, which they deemed to be similarly infested with sickness and malaria and thus also too deadly for white settlement, the British decided to cordon off an area of the island and segregate themselves from the Nigerians. A similar strategy had been employed in other British colonies and had “worked” to alleviate health concerns, like Freetown in Sierra Leone and Accra in the Gold Coast.\textsuperscript{45} With this goal in mind, they set out to drain the swamps around the island, and much of the urban planning that took place after 1900 had health and sanitation at its core, like the various Slum Clearance Schemes of the 1920s-40s.\textsuperscript{46} The post-WWI era saw a new generation of colonial administrator whose focus was on the health, hygiene, and safety of people, especially

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 235-241.

\textsuperscript{43} Bigon, \textit{A History of Urban Planning}, 131

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 145. A.G. Hopkins argues that that the British conception of property rights, which the Yoruba had none, was one compelling reason for the introduction of legitimate commerce. Doing so weakened the position of the Oba of Lagos, whose main source of wealth in the nineteenth century before British annexation was slavery. See Hopkins, “Property Rights” And Mann, \textit{Marrying Well}, 11-17.

\textsuperscript{45} Residential segregation was a cheaper policy for colonial officials, especially when it came to city wide urban expenditures. It was much cheaper to focus that money on the European section of town. For a detailed look at the planning that went into colonial Lagos, see Bigon, \textit{A History of Urban Planning}, especially chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 131.
the Europeans, of the city. Although there were only roughly 300 Europeans in Lagos 1901, that number grew to over 1200 by 1931.\textsuperscript{47} Added to this was the increase in the Nigerian population of Lagos as migrants flooded the city in response to the growth of industry, trade, and shipping companies.\textsuperscript{48} The rapidly growing Nigerian population heightened colonial fears of disease and overcrowding. Thus, colonial governments across British Africa supported segregated spaces for Europeans and Africans, especially in urban landscapes where there was closer contact, because of the fear of disease transfer. Health was paramount, and developing healthy bodies that could survive was key.

“Character,” and Colonialism: The Cult of “Imperial Sportsmanship”

The Imperial Administration that came to Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth century was predominately composed of men who had studied in the British Public School system.\textsuperscript{49} Through the early twentieth century, the British had developed a robust sporting culture centered on the values and importance of a healthy body as a prerequisite for a healthy mind.\textsuperscript{50} Sport in school instilled the desired traits of responsibility, leadership, initiative, and integrity— all central tenets of what the British

\textsuperscript{47} Akin Mabogunje, \textit{Urbanization in Nigeria} (London: University of London Press, 1969), 264. In 1931, British persons made up the majority of Europeans (1,053), with French (37), Germans (34), and Syrians/Lebanese (134).

\textsuperscript{48} As will be discussed below, the overall population of Lagos increased from 73,766 in 1901 to 230,256 in 1950. Mabogunje, \textit{Urbanization in Nigeria}, 262.


termed “character”—into the students.\textsuperscript{51} These men were seen as ideal candidates to run the empire, according to Lord Cromer: “the system of education adopted at our [British] Public Schools . . . is of a nature to turn out a number of young men who are admirable agents in the execution of an imperial policy.”\textsuperscript{52} In fact, Sir Ralph Furse, the man in charge of recruiting for the position of Colonial Administrator or District Officer from 1910 to 1948, looked for young men with athletic distinction from among the graduates of Public Schools because of his belief that they would be best prepared to rule the empire because they had been taught character through sport.\textsuperscript{53} The young men who ventured into service around the British Empire were thus sporting men, “active young men, endowed with good health, high character, and fair abilities.”\textsuperscript{54}

Historian Anthony Kirk-Greene, himself a former colonial administrator in Bornu in Northeast Nigeria, noted that, “Success at games came to be equated with the stamp of having character” and thus “the success of the district officer in Africa depends on his possessing ‘character’: character is tested, developed, and proved by participating in


\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
team games.” The ethos of sport that had been instilled in these administrators was then passed on, since they believed that through sport, colonial officials could teach Africans the proper skills and traits, and most importantly, cultivate proper character. Sport and the character building provided by sport became more important in colonial thinking in the interwar period, as concerns over health melded with concerns over bridging the cultural gap between British and Nigerian. Indeed, the majority of colonial administration, as well as missionaries, and businessmen, came from this sporting tradition and brought ideas about sport and character to Nigeria. Several, like Douglas J. Collister (Chapter 3), Jack Farnsworth (Chapter 5), and Donald Faulkner (Chapter 5) had a profound impact on boxing in Nigeria.

The British, aware of the myths and ideas of “a white man’s grave,” took physical measures to ensure that their bodies were in the best condition for surviving Nigeria. The colonial climate was a continual concern for the colonial administrator and expatriate in Lagos. Part of the reason that colonial administrators were chosen from the ranks of British college and university sporting athletes was the belief that they would be better leaders in the colonies if they were able to prove themselves on the sporting pitch and fields, but another reason was that these men were perceived as

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55 Kirk-Greene, “Imperial Education,” 84 and 85. As sport became a more important aspect of the collegiate experience, especially at the prestigious Oxford and Cambridge universities, sport was not only an acceptable tool for physical well-being, but also shaping a strong moral character. The example of Oxford and Cambridge were copied by other schools in Britain, including the emphasis on sport. The British believed that sport developed moral characteristics in young boys and adolescents that would ensure their successful transition into adulthood and prepare them for life. Through sport, young men could learn the valuable skills and traits like courage, team work, discipline, adherence to the rules, and respect for the referee, strength, and “pluck.”

56 Speaking about eastern Nigeria, George Basden noted that the West Coast of Africa, especially Nigeria, “has maintained its evil reputation and fully justified its claim to rank as part of the ‘white man’s grave.’” Basden, Among the Ibos of Nigeria, 35.
being in their peak physical condition, best suited for the health challenges of the African climate.\textsuperscript{57} Many of those officials that came to Nigeria had been athletes in Britain. For example, in the province of Bornu in Northeast Nigeria, several District Officers in succession were former school athletes. T.E Letchworth, who became District Officer of Bornu in Northeast Nigeria in 1920, was himself a former Cambridge rower.\textsuperscript{58} D.G. Milne, who came to Bornu in the 1950s, was a lacrosse Blue, while Anthony Kirk-Greene was a Blue in fives.\textsuperscript{59} Sir Hugh Clifford, Governor of Nigeria from 1919 to 1925, was also an avid sportsman: “his was the body of an athlete… [he] would pursue a regular regimen of physical fitness for the rest of his life.”\textsuperscript{60} Clifford, while in Nigeria, “turned to such sports as riding, tennis, and above all swimming. His physical stamina became legendary in all the areas of the Empire in which he served.”\textsuperscript{61} It was reported in all the local newspapers, that Sir James Robertson, who became Governor of Nigeria in 1955, was an avid sportsman while at school at Oxford.\textsuperscript{62} Furthermore, colonial administrators and governors were known to promote sport in their territories.

\textsuperscript{57} Kirke-Greene, “Imperial Administration,” 84-87.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 101.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 101. A “Blue” or “Full Blue” was the highest level athletic distinction in public schools, especially Oxford and Cambridge where the practice originated in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Fives is a game known as “hand tennis” with players striking a ball against a wall, usually played in teams of two.

\textsuperscript{60} Harry Gailey, Clifford: Imperial Proconsul. London: Rex Collings, Ltd., 1982. 9.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 9. Hugh Clifford also wrote the introduction to the biography of Sir Frederick Weld, “Pioneer of Empire” and a man he greatly admired. Weld was Clifford’s first boss while working within the Empire, and Weld “threw himself into every boyish game and sport – an ardour to succeed in everything which he undertook, which followed him through life, and was one of his strongest characteristics.” Weld had a profound love for all sport, but especially football. Quote found in Lady Lovat Alice, The Life of Sir Frederick Weld: A Pioneer of Empire (London: John Murray, 1914), 4.

\textsuperscript{62} Several articles detailing his life were to include his success at sports while at school at Oxford. For Robertson’s memoir see James Robertson, Transition in Africa: From Direct Rule to Independence: A Memoir (London: C. Hurst, 1974).
After becoming Acting Lieutenant Governor of Northern Nigeria, one of John Fremantle’s first tasks was to commandeer an abandoned bungalow and turned it into a squash court. Edouard Girouard, who became the first Governor of Northern Nigeria, was “to enjoy a reputation for encouraging all manly sports” during his service.

As contact with the British increased in the nineteenth century, Nigerians continually encountered British men who had their own preconceived notions about sport and the primitiveness of African versions of sport. As graduates of the “athletocracy” of Britain, these men descended on Nigeria with ideals of health, character, and education that would have an important impact on the development of modern sport and the educated elite in the entire Nigerian colony and Lagos specifically.

Western Schooling, Character, and Manliness

As Kristin Mann argues, Christianity and western education followed Saro and Amaro immigrants to Lagos and created a class of black educated elites in Lagos who saw an important value in educating their youth. European education had been introduced to Lagos by missionaries, many of them educated Saro themselves, as far

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64 Anthony Kirk-Greene, “Canada in Africa: Sir Percy Girouard, Neglected Colonial Governor.” *African Affairs*, 83:331 (1984): 212. Although Girouard (1907-1909 in Northern Nigeria) was not known himself as an exceptional sportsman and did not win distinction in sport at school, he did see the value in sport and supported it thoroughly when was a colonial governor in Nigeria and Kenya. Girouard however was selected before WWI, the moment that AKG describes as the turning point in the selection of athletic colonial administrators.

back as 1842 when they arrived at Bagadry. In fact, it was several educated Saro who started some of the first Lagosian missions and schools. James White and Thomas Babington Macaulay, both Saros, founded two of the earliest schools and churches. White founded the first Church Mission Society (CMS) church and primary school in 1852, while Macaulay founded the CMS Grammar School in 1859. While they served primarily the Saro and Amaro community at first, by the close of the nineteenth century these schools and church congregations included the local Yoruba. By 1884, Lagos had twenty-four primary and five secondary schools, educating 1,861 and 156 students respectively. By 1912, there were 201 primary schools and 7 secondary schools in the whole of southwestern Nigeria, teaching approximately 14,000 and 800 students respectively. Missionaries had a monopoly on education in Nigeria with very little government oversight. Even as late as 1942, missionaries controlled 99 percent of schools in Nigeria, and had educated 97% of all Nigerian students. As Kristin Mann notes about the nineteenth century, this resulted in an educated Christian subculture in Lagos (“an educated elite”) that played an important and disproportionate social, political, and economic role in the city in the twentieth century. They understood and imitated English dress, customs, and activities. They also enjoyed English leisure


68 Mann, Marrying Well, 18.

69 Ibid.,

70 James Coleman, Nigeria: Background to Nationalism. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), 113. Coleman argues that few, if any, literate Nigerians had any schooling outside the missionary schools as late as 1945.

71 Mann, Marrying Well, 28-29.
pastimes, especially sport. Many learned and developed affection for these sports during their school days, like Nigeria’s first President after independence, Nnamdi Azikiwe, who we shall see had a major influence on boxing (Chapter 3).

Lagos’s rapidly increasing population meant that there was not enough room in the schools for all children. Moreover, there was a lack of government support in creating new ones. Even as late as 1947 there were still complaints about the lack of educational facilities for Lagosian children. A Dr. Maja called a meeting at Glover Memorial Hall “to wake up the people” and to recruit help for the city’s education needs. He complained that Lagos was backward and lamented the fact that at that time there were only 10 secondary schools in all of Lagos, all owned by the missions and/or the government. He also noted that 4,215 kids were trying to gain admission to schools in 1944, in 1945 there were 4444, and in 1946 were 4144; of these only 887 were admitted in 1944-45. In 1946, he continued, at Kings College 850 boys took the entrance exam and only 25 were admitted. Queens College had 1208 girls take the exam and only 30 were admitted. Lagos Government School had 800 applications and only one was admitted. He concluded that a new, well-planned national school system was needed to replace the failed system established twenty years prior.

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72 Ibid., 19.

73 For example, Nnamdi Azikiwe noted in his autobiography the enjoyment he had for school sport days. Reggie Thunderbolt Williams recalled his own love for sport and that his father, “Boundary” Williams (discussed in Chapter Two) was an avid sportsman. Hogan Kid Bassey, future featherweight champion of the world remembered his love for soccer during and after school.

74 “Provision for more schools in Lagos suggested: Working committee set up and fund inaugurated” NDT 30th January 1947.

75 Ibid.
The schools built in Lagos and across the British Empire were modeled on those found in England in the nineteenth century, and therefore held the same values and priorities as their predecessors in England. One important aspect of this was the colonial education system’s emphasis on the issues of health and sanitation in the classroom and through a strong curriculum of sports in schools. The resulting design, known as the “House System,” was a product of a “Muscular Christianity” movement of the nineteenth century. Saheed Aderinto argues that the colonial administration and missionaries that came to Lagos gendered school and society, preparing boys and girls for different prospects and roles. Boys were pushed into school competitions that focused on public display, like sports, to prepare boys for a life in the public sphere, while girls were taught skills for a life of domesticity. The effect, as Lisa Lindsay notes, was to create a male gendered public space after WWII, a topic further discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 of this study. The major schools in Lagos all subscribed to the “House System,” which separated school students into houses for living and sports. This was done for many reasons: it taught responsibility and accountability to one’s

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76 Sir George Guggisberg, governor general of the gold coast from 1919 to 1927 and an avid cricketer, wrote a booklet on colonial education policy. Guggisberg claimed that no amount of education was proper unless character training was front and center. See Kirk-Greene, “Imperial Administration.”


79 Ibid.

peers, respect for one’s house, and pride in the school, all traits that could later be expanded to the city and colony as a whole. Lagos’ most prestigious school, King’s College, modeled after the London school of the same name, had an annual sports’ day in which the houses of the school competed against one another, starting in 1917. The CMS Grammar School had six houses, named after Crowther, Stanley, Livingstone, Wilberforce, Gordon, and “School,” and inter-house competitions and “sports days” were eagerly attended events on the school annual calendar. School athletic competitions became a popular city pastime, frequented and supported by British and Nigerian elites. The presence of popular and important persons within the government, or Nigerian notables, at these events were meant to show the importance of sport to the people and to the development of Nigerians as a whole. Governors were also known to hand out trophies and awards at school sporting days, and their

81 For a similar case from Tanganyika, see H.S. Ndee, “Western Influences on Sport in Tanzania: British Middle-Class Educationalists, Missionaries and the Diffusion of Adapted Athleticism,” The International Journal of the History of Sport, 27: 5 (2010): 905-936. Also see “Kings College – 19th Annual Sports – Hyde Johnson Win Challenge Cup” NDT 20 October 1936. Two houses – Hyde Johnson and Mackee-Wright. It was a crowded event and the police band played throughout. The Governor was in attendance and handed out prizes. And “Igbozi College – Third Annual Athletic Sports – Freeman’s House Win Cup” NDT 23 October 1936. A good number of prominent Europeans and Africans attended as reported by the newspaper. 3 houses in competition: Oluwole, Freemans, and Aggrey. Acting Director of Education presented the cup and special thanks was given to a Mr. Porter who started the initiative 3 years prior to start an athletic competition at the school to develop character in the students.


84 For example, “St Benedict Catholic School Oshogbo Holds Annual Sports meeting” NDT 28 December 1940. A big crowd of Europeans, Africans, and Syrians to watch the inter-house competitions. The four houses – St Gregory’s, St Augustine’s, St Peter’s and Benedict’s. The events were well contested, including the Crawling Races for Kindergartens and Obstacle races for junior boys. The Tug of War was won by St Gregory’s. Also many girls’ schools had the house system and sporting competitions. See NDT 25th November 1940 – “Abeokuta Baptist Girls’ School Inter-House competition” – 4 houses at the school and 19 events were contested. It was attended by the Oba Alaiyeuluwa the Alake and the Resident of the Province, E.G. Hawkesworth. The best event for viewers was the Indian Club Race. The four houses – Agbebi, Agboola, Edens, and Lumbley.
speeches often praised the good work in cultivating character, uplift of race, and discipline in youth. For example, the Katsina Middle School Annual Athletic Competition in 1936 was attended by the Emir of Katsina who distributed prizes. It was also watched by the Emir’s school children, district heads, chiefs, councilors, and prominent Europeans and Africans. Trophies and Shields for competitions between schools, some dating back to the early 1900s, were also hotly contested and the matches eagerly attended.

The 1930s saw an unprecedented rise in schooling in Lagos, but despite this the low rate of school admittance and widespread adult illiteracy were still major problems reported throughout the interwar and post WWII era newspapers. It was estimated in 1940 that out of a gross population of seven million in Nigeria, less than 240,000 were registered for any school, roughly 1.1% of the population. The colony was slow to implement educational services and only a small percentage of colonial Nigerian children attended schools, the majority of which were located in Lagos. The graduates formed the Nigerian and Lagosian educated elite that had grown up during and after 1930s with a love for sport fostered in the house system. Hogan ‘Kid’ Bassey, who

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85 Examples of these were found throughout the 1930s until independence.

86 “Katsina Middle School Annual Athletic Competition” NDT 28 October 1936. Urling-Smith Shield contested. The teams represented were the N.A. Workshops, Geological Survey, N.A. Police, Medical department, and Marajin Gari’s Team.

87 The Rouden Shield, contested in Oyo between the Anglican school and Baptist school dates to 1900, Peace Challenge Shield was donated to Calabar schools in 1919, and the Clifford Shield for interprovincial track and field in 1921 to name a few. E.O. Ojeme, “Sport in Nigeria,” found in Eric Wagner, Sport in Asia and Africa: a Comparative Handbook. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 254.

88 For Example, “Crusade against Illiteracy” NDT 18 November 1940. Articles about the spread of education, the need for adult education facilities at night, and efforts to eradicate adult illiteracy were a weekly feature in newspapers after WWII.

89 Ibid.
moved from Old Calabar to Lagos to attend school at the age of 11 in 1943, recalled: “Here I went to a big primary school, which I enjoyed very much, particularly because I could take part in proper sports.” Former amateur boxer Olu Moses, who attended St. Jude’s School in Ebute Metta in the late 1940s, said that “Sport was part of the school curriculum in 1946, especially football and boxing… Sport was very important to my school. We participated in all sports. Sport was done side by side with academics.”

Education, in terms of sports and the values they promoted, was especially emphasized for the white children of administrators and expatriates. For example, a 1935 article in the *Nigerian Observer* pointed out the need for special care for the next generation of colonial administrators, on whom “Our hopes and future salvation and progress of the race are centered.” There was a concern that these children were growing up without the proper lessons for “playing the game” fairly and squarely. “We however cannot deny the fact that a sportsman's spirit is one that a great majority of our people have yet to learn. If they have it, for the good of the race, it is best that they exhibit it, fully and squarely.”

This next generation needed the lessons of the sporting field since they transcended into everyday life, creating a Christian lifestyle of honesty, "love, peace, long-suffering, meekness, and above all faith." If the white race was to survive and not degenerate, in Nigeria and elsewhere, the article warned that the

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91 Interview by Bamidele Ajayi with Olu Moses, Surulere, Lagos, September 16, 2015.


93 Ibid.

94 Ibid.
ideological and physical lessons of sport, which had elevated the British to their current position, must not be forgotten.

As several scholars have noted, the colonial government attempted to direct education to not only train civil servants and farmers, but also as a form of sociopolitical control. The government’s goals for the European-style colonial education were based on the development of the economy and the subsequent needs for labor and administrators. With so few whites in the colony, many important positions in the colonial administration were staffed by educated Nigerians in the late nineteenth century. However, after the turn of the twentieth century, racial barriers to employment began to take hold and many educated Nigerians were limited to lower-level white collar jobs like bookkeepers and clerks. While the colonial government in Nigeria recognized and took advantage of the schools that educated their administrators and bureaucrats, it did not dispense funds for the creation or development of education in the colony. Thus the burden was placed on missions and laypersons to create, staff, and run schools until the early 1950s. The lack of direct government oversight also allowed for a wide variety of curricula to be taught in Lagos. However, the colonial government in Nigeria stressed that the purpose of education was to develop “good

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96 See Usuanlele, “Colonial State,” 47-72.

97 For example, in 1881, the Civil Establishment employed 45 Nigerians and only 11 Europeans. See Mann, Marrying Well, 20.

citizens” and threatened that the school would be closed down if that criteria was not met.99 The sports included in each school’s curriculum were also decided on the basis of whims of the teachers and available coaches in the area. Throughout the 1930s King’s College, Lagos, had boxing as an afterschool sport because there was a teacher and coach who was a former boxer and an avid boxing fan. That program attracted several young men like Nigerian Middleweight Champion Reggie “Thunderbolt” Williams, as discussed in Chapter 3.100 Naturally, these privately run schools were not free nor cheap for parents, and the number of students admitted was always far smaller than those wanting to be educated. It was not until a series of Acts and commissions post 1945 that educational development began to come under the direct purview of the colonial government.101 Primary education was not made mandatory or free until 1957.102

Beyond the fact that the available space in schools could not accommodate the population of Nigeria, the education system present through WWII was too heavily involved in teaching Greek, Latin, the Classics, and Religion, “which cannot in any way,” complained the West African Pilot (WAP) in 1941, “be regarded as moral instruction.”103 Edited by Nnamdi Azikiwe, the WAP believed that schools in Nigeria should involve

102 Ibid., 8. NAI, FEO 361 S.I. Serial No. 10 “Education Annual Reports Federal Territory 1957-1959. Although free education, many private schools still operate in Lagos to this day and continued at the time to charge fees.
103 “Fuller Curriculum for Schools” WAP 7 April 1941.
more “hands-on” instruction “to teach children how to be useful citizens.” To the WAP, this meant more physical fitness education for youth: “Physical fitness is one phase of the development of youth today which is receiving attention everywhere in the world. Boys and girls are encouraged to make their bodies hard and sound by exercise, in order to be better able to face the battle of life with success…this campaign of fitness must cover the whole field of our younger generation.” The paper recognized that in order to do so, schools need help from the community, who should donate trophies and cups for competitions, as well as bring their physical expertise to coach the youngsters, “to help out budding Trojans and Spartans in their training sound bodies.” The implication is that the growing youth of Nigeria, to be “useful” citizens, must develop their bodies as well as their minds, and physical fitness through sport and training was deemed indispensable by certain sections of the Lagosian population. As will become clear in Chapter 3, this period began the linking of citizenship, health, and sport with boxing. By the early 1940s, student athletes were viewed as “all our heroes of physical fitness, and as such we admire their efforts to develop their brawn in the same way as they develop their mental capacity for the onward march of this great Dependency to progress.”

104 Ibid. Many of the early editorials and columns were written by Azikiwe himself. Azikiwe required a high standard for his paper, “it was said that even at that time (1937), a Sub-Editor had to possess the London matriculation or its equivalent…before he could be appointed” to a position on the staff of the WAP. The standard was so high that any spelling mistakes by his workers were fined two shillings, six pence – deducted from each pay packet. See Dayo Duyile, Makers of Nigerian Press: An Historical Analysis of Newspaper Development, The Pioneer Heroes, The Modern Press Barons and the New Publishers. (Lagos: Gong Communications (Nigeria) Ltd., 1987), 142.

105 “Training for Fitness” WAP April 7 1941.

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid.
Just as Britain was in the middle of a “Fitter Britain Campaign” during this time, Lagosian schools also wanted to do their part and take physical education seriously. In 1937 the Principle of King’s College, Lagos, complained that too often schools in Nigeria imposed “too academic a curriculum” to shape boys into proper men. Physical education was needed, and the Principle was happy to announce that the following year, King’s College, Lagos, was scheduled to introduce a second football team and a cricket team, for the teams to play ten games of football, as well as twelve for cricket. At the C.M.S. Grammar School, Lagos, health and physical development went hand in hand. Like King’s College, Lagos, football and cricket were actively encouraged by British principals, who stressed that “Health matters concerning students were given top priority, [and] helped to foster their sound physical development as a necessary step to training their minds.” Being on a sports team or other school society not only promoted social cohesion and friendship among the pupils, it also ensured “that they grew up into responsible adult citizens.” Several Nigerians who would play an important role in the promotion of boxing came from this educated elite. For example, Curtis Crispin (C.C.) Adeniyi- Jones (1876-1957) was a trained doctor

108 “Kings College Speech Day” NDT 12th April 1937.  
109 Ibid.  
110 Ibid.  
111 Olabanji, “A History of the CMS Grammar School,” specifically chapter 3 and quote from 47.  
112 Ibid., 48.
who later became the medical examiner for the Nigerian Boxing Board of Control after 1949, as well as the medical officer at many fights around Lagos from the 1930s.\textsuperscript{113}

Furthermore, intercollege competitions were seen as not only useful but desirable for the growing generation of Nigerians:

The inter-college meetings between Middle Schools of the Yoruba Provinces and the Hussey Shield Competition between North and South have demonstrated in most striking manner the extent to which these periodical Athletic meetings for students are capable of building up in our citizens of the future both real sporting spirit and the strong physique which means so much to a rising country like ours. It must be therefore most welcome the news that the experiment that has proved so successful in the Yoruba provinces is now being made in the Warri-Beni area.\textsuperscript{114}

\textbf{Physical Education, Manual Labor, and Sport Leagues}

The molding of character, as seen above, was important to the selection of colonial administrators and the language of “character” permeated into Nigerian discourse in the 1930s and 1940s. Physical activity and manual labor, as well as sports, together could develop the proper character in youth. Consequently, there was a call for a revamped vocational training that had increased emphasis on physical education.

In educating our children to become leaders of tomorrow, they should be taught that in addition to Reading, ‘Riting, “Rithmetic, and Religion (which constitute the four R’s), they should also learn to use their Head (Efficiency), Hands (Skill), and Heart (Character), the four H’s [sic]. We should develop their Personality, preserve their Health, cultivate their Intellect, and mould their Character…\textsuperscript{115}

As the above quote exemplifies, the cultivation of the “four R’s” needed to happen alongside the “four H’s.” Physical education and participation sports, as perceived by

\textsuperscript{113} Adeniyi-Jones was listed by Kristin Mann as one of her 200 educated elite in Lagos. Mann, \textit{Marrying Well}, 128.

\textsuperscript{114} “School Sports” \textit{NDT} 12 June 1937.

\textsuperscript{115} “Dignity of Manual Labour” \textit{WAP} June 9 1941.
the British and the Nigerian educated elite, was integral to developing health and character. However, by the 1940s manual labor was considered a lesser form of employment than clerical and civil administration work in the eyes of many Lagosians. In response, many of the larger European corporations, like the United Africa Company, or government-funded jobs, like the railroads or the police, developed their own sports clubs for employees. These clubs began to play against one another in the late 1920s, and the creation of the Lagos Amateur Football League facilitated inter-employment competitions.

The 1930s saw the growth of popular, work-based sporting leagues in Nigeria, but they were still in their infancy. The Nigerian public began to attend football matches in larger numbers throughout the decade, but it was not popular with Lagosian fans at first. By 1937, there were even complaints that football and cricket matches were not well enough attended by Lagosians. Many of matches were in fact canceled due to lack of spectators. Crowds would become dissatisfied due to factors like poorly played matches and ignorant referees, leading to smaller audiences after word of mouth dissuaded potential fans. Football remained popular especially for the elite and the British, therefore, but during this time the sport was plagued by growing pains.

116 “Community Welfare Centres” WAP 25 August 1941.

117 Ibid., and “Zik Gives Public Lecture on Nigerian Vocational Education” WAP 9th June 1941 —. Azikiwe gave a series of lectures during 1941 attesting to the fact that manual laborer should be more prized in the eyes of society than the clerk or civil servant.

118 Many of these associations began sport clubs after WWI ad were a major tool during the interwar years and after WWII in recruiting workers.

119 “Sports Topics by Ranji” WAP 24th November 1937.

120 NDT 22nd September 1936. Article in sports section that decries the dissatisfaction of the crowds at Lagos soccer matches with the poor performance of the referees in keeping the rules and ‘doing their
Other traditional British school sports became more popular as spectator sports during the interwar period as a growing number of Nigerian elites graduated from the western-style schools. Even after they left school and began careers in various fields, their attachment to their schools and school sports continued. Many Nigerian males join their school’s “Old Boys Club,” which would meet for social events, community help, and sporting competitions. Part of the agenda of these Old Boys’ Clubs was to play football and cricket, pursue other athletics, and practice swimming – in other words, participate in traditional British school sports. Many enjoyed playing traditionally “male” sports like football, cricket, field hockey, and Cross Country races. With the various influences from British culture, especially as it was transmitted through the school system, sporting institutions began to take shape during the interwar period thanks also in part to the steady promotion by colonial administrators and educational institutions. But one cannot forget that the Nigerians themselves, the ones playing the sports, had the most important role of all. Their demand for more sports cubes, facilities, and competitions pressured the government into promoting more sport.

Health and Sport

Regardless of the views of the British that came to Lagos and Nigeria, sport and physical recreation was not new to African societies. Nigerians’ love for sport and pastimes was part of the reason why European sport was readily adopted. Beyond the enjoyment of the sport and games, however, sport played several important social

work. If this were to continue then the league should expect less fans and less interest in league soccer. This question will plague the league and should hire former soccer players to be refs.

121 “Sports Topics by Ranji” WAP 24 November 1937. Many Nigerians believed that tennis was not a masculine sport, one that was better left for old men and women.
functions, from social interaction and building friendships to a way to gain stature, and fame, local or regional. The reasons one chose to play was not a major difference between races, Basden argued. “A boy is a boy whether in England or West Africa, and what applies to one nationality applies very much to the other in the sphere of sports and pastimes.” To Basden, sport was one form of cultural transfer that could go smoothly, since all boys play. And with this play, Nigerians would get “inculcated” by “the habit of regular exercise…and there is no doubt that it has proved beneficial to the health of those who play.” Within Lagos, the educated elite described by Mann played an important role in the diffusion of sport in early Lagos, and it was through schooling in the early twentieth century that the foundations for many sports and sports leagues were laid.

Although these currents of cultural transmission, specifically British ideas about health, sport, and character, were circulating in Lagos between the wars, there was no guarantee that they would diffuse to Lagosians nor that they would accept them wholeheartedly. Other historians have argued that the diffusion of the messages of colonialism did not always happen as the colonizers imagined, nor could the message be free from adaptation by Africans. The argument here is not whether the ideas permeated into Nigerian society, but rather recognizes that colonialism brought with it many cultural transfers and focusing on the ways that these took root. The colonial ideas like sportsmanship were in fact adapted to suit African needs, in this case towards a muscular citizenship, the subject of Chapter 4. The Cult of Sportsmanship that came

122 Basden, Among the Ibos, 136.

123 Ibid.
on the backs of the colonial administrators, “muscular” missionaries, and British expatriates might not have been apparently widespread at first, but it was nonetheless present in Lagos. As health and sport became intertwined in the minds of colonials, and was taught to Nigerians in schools and disseminated through newspapers and sports clubs, the ethos of sport began to gain traction. As a new literate and educated generation of Nigerians came of age, the lessons learned from sport and how sport should be used to train the leaders of a new Nigeria played a more important role in their lives. The creation of the ideal “modern” urban men in Nigeria often was hinged on the language and values of sport and sportsmanship. By the early 1950s, the sport that brought all of these currents and issues together was boxing.
CHAPTER 3
LAGOS, BOXING, AND THE GROWTH OF INTERCOLONIAL BOXING

Prewar Boxing and Lagos

As we have seen in Chapter 2, the British education system produced sports-centered colonial administrators, as well as missionaries and expatriates. Once this education system was implemented in Nigeria, British ideals regarding sport, especially sportsmanship and character, impinged on indigenous ideals of health, manliness, sanitation, and citizenship. This chapter examines the factors that started the fusion of these two groups of ideals together to form a more welcoming environment for boxing in the late 1930s, which later allowed boxing to be the most popular sport in Nigeria by the end of the 1950s. The Great Depression and the mass migration of young men to Lagos, the growth and spread of daily newspapers and advertisements featuring boxing, the increased visibility of boxers and clubs in Lagos, and lastly the rise of an educated Nigerian sporting class brought up in British-styled schools together paved the way for the post-WWII success of boxing. These developments can be illustrated through the lives of two figures: Nnamdi “Zik” Azikiwe and Reginald “Thunderbolt” Williams. During the interwar and WWII years, the work of “Zik” Azikiwe and “Thunderbolt” Williams laid the foundation for boxing’s success as the most important and popular sport in postwar Lagos.

Three things needed to happen in order for boxing to be successful in Lagos: Firstly, newspapers needed to be available as a platform to disseminate information about local and international boxing, including the heavyweight championship reign of African American Joe Louis. Next, a local Nigerian had to become the beacon of boxing, an example of the well-shaped men that boxing produced and an encouragement for
other Nigerians to take up the sport. That beacon was Reggie Williams, whose size and stature represented the strong Nigerian man best able to survive the rigors of urban living. Lastly, boxing needed to link itself to national pride and progress through international competitions. The intercolonial tournament against the Gold Coast in 1938 focused popular attention and linked boxing to the strength and progress of Nigeria as a nation. These three conditions were met after 1936, marking a turning point for boxing in Lagos and Nigeria. Both “Zik” Azikiwe and “Thunderbolt” Williams were representative of these larger processes: Azikiwe as an editor and owner in newspapers which focused on human interest stories and sport, and Williams as a boxing idol. By examining their careers during this time period, we can see how each in turn facilitated the spread of boxing and brought together the currents discussed in Chapter 2, namely character, sportsmanship, and health, through a discussion about boxing. Although they were not successful during the interwar period in making boxing popular, their work in this time period made sure that after the war these currents came together through boxing. Moreover, their efforts and presence in Lagos had a marked impact on ideals of masculinity and nationalism.

The chapter begins with an overview of Lagos during the Great Depression, then looks at struggles of boxing in the interwar years up to 1936. It then focuses on the work of Azikiwe and Williams after their arrival and elevation in status in Lagos in 1936. In order to understand Azikiwe’s contribution to boxing, we must look at how he changed the content of newspaper production in Lagos during this time through his concentration on sport and health, along with an increased visibility of boxing and boxers, in the content he printed in his newspapers, as shown through the example of the number of
stories he printed about boxer/boxing champion Joe Louis. Moreover, Azikiwe’s work in creating Zik’s Athletic Clubs (ZAC) also spread the ethos and culture of boxing. The chapter moves on to a discussion of Reginald Williams as the first role model of boxing. His large, muscular stature reshaped ideals of masculinity in the city and made a visual link between fitness, health, and boxing that solidified after the war. His participation in the intercolonial boxing tournament in 1938 had lasting effects on local ideals of boxing, masculinity, and nationalism that were interrupted but not abandoned during the Second World War. Lastly, the chapter looks at the way boxing was promoted during the war and how boxing was linked to national pride and duty.

The Interwar Years, the Great Depression, and Nigeria

After the First World War Lagos became the economic and political epicenter of the newly amalgamated Nigerian colony. With such a change came an influx of peoples, both Nigerian and British, to the city. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the city of Lagos grew rapidly during the 1920s and 1930s, from roughly 99,960 persons in 1921 to over 175,000 in 1935, despite of (or because of) the Great Depression. Moreover, the number of Europeans in the city grew from 300 in 1901 to over 4,000 in 1931. As

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Ayedele Olukoju remarked, “beneath the glitter commonly associated with the port city were the social costs of trade: population explosion, high cost of living, scarcity and inadequacy of housing, unsanitary living conditions, and the educational backwardness of her youth.”⁴ All of these problems of rapid urbanization were exacerbated by the Great Depression. Destitute migrants traveled to Lagos in search of a refuge and employment to pay taxes or social obligations. But those that arrived there found a difficult situation: lack of housing, schooling, and jobs, despite Lagos being “the most important employment centre in the country.”⁵ Lagos was a commercial hub of international trade and not dependent on agriculture, and thus employment opportunities in Lagos were greater than the rest of the country, not to mention that Lagos was by far the most modern city during this era.⁶ According to Fourchard and Mabogunje, the continual flow of migrants from the hinterland meant that Lagos remained a predominantly male and youthful city into the 1950s.⁷ In fact, mostly due to hinterland migration, Lagos’ population grew by over 550% between 1900 and 1950, and 1600% between 1900 and 1963.⁸ Throughout the 1930s and until Nigerian

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⁴ Ayedele Olukoju, 132.


independence in 1960, Lagos and other cities grew in size as rural laborers migrated in increasing numbers to urban areas.⁹

Part of the reason for the movement of men to cities in search of wages was the introduction of direct taxation on the whole of Nigeria between the wars. As Naanen explains, “Taxation [in Nigeria] … was not only to raise revenue but also to drive out indigenous currencies as well as expand production for exchange.”¹⁰ By the end of the 1920s, according to Naanen, a rudimentary system of direct taxation had been implemented, mostly through a poll tax.¹¹ According to the British, and especially Lord Lugard, first Governor-General of Nigeria, having Africans pay taxes was necessary “for education in good citizenship.” Moreover, it would force Africans to work during labor shortages. In order to pay their taxes, which were only collected in cash, workers increasingly engaged in market production in its various forms, while also earning cash to pay the tax on imported colonial goods.¹² This situation was not without hardship nor was it accepted without resistance, as the payment of direct cash taxes caused considerable friction across Nigeria, the best of example being the Women’s War of

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¹⁰ For more information on the taxation system and its distribution in Nigeria, see Naanen “‘You Are Demanding Tax from the Dead,” 82.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, 82-3.
1929. Nevertheless, despite the conflict over trying to integrate taxes into colonialism, the interwar period did also see the increase in young men migrating to urban areas searching for income to pay for taxes and imported goods. This process was exacerbated by the Great Depression, which not only deflated export prices, but also inflated imported goods while not affecting the rate of taxation, meaning extra hardship for Nigerians.

The Great Depression hit Nigeria relatively hard in some sectors. Nigeria was, by and large, dominated by an export-based economy primarily in palm kernels/oil, cocoa, and groundnuts. According to Ayodeji Olukoju, the price of palm oil dropped 600% between 1929 and 1934. In fact, all exports took a sharp decline: the total value of exports in 1929 was roughly £17,000,000 but by 1938 had dropped to approximately £9,700,000. With prices fluctuating downward, Nigerians grew more groundnuts and cotton to sell in order to survive hardship, pay taxes, maintain pre-Depression income levels and fulfill social obligations. As Moses Ochonu has shown, during the Great Depression Nigerians were the “collateral damage” of economic policies set to keep

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14 For more information on the taxation system and its distribution in Nigeria, see Naanen “You Are Demanding Tax from the Dead,” 83-4. “The cheapest brand of cigarettes was increased by 150 percent, spirits 447 percent, while grey baft, used for clothing, increased from 1d to 2d per lb. The Women’s War represented a dramatic outcome of this combination of produce price failure, the timing of that failure, and steep increases in import prices. It was a time of extraordinary economic pressure on people.”

15 Ayodeji Olukoju, The “Liverpool” of West Africa, 170. The price dropped from 29/10s to 4/5s over that time period.


17 Ayodeji Olukoju, The Liverpool of West Africa, 170.
According to Ochonu, as the colonial government pursued a heavy taxation policy, many young men resorted to migration within and away from Northern Nigeria, including seeking wages in Lagos on the docks or other industry. With Lagos being the principle home of many industries and British companies like the United Africa Company and Holt and Co., Lagos and other urban areas swelled with unemployed men seeking work.

On top of the migration of men from the “hinterland,” many expatriate firms reduced their staffs, adding to the numbers of jobless men roaming Lagos in search of work. Olukoju adds that the lower prices for agricultural produce similarly forced many farmers to lay off workers. A report on the unemployment situation in 1931 remarked that “Lagos is full of unemployed, almost unemployable, immigrants from the protectorate who have...gravitated towards the town in search not necessarily of wealth but of a steady cash income per month.” As Olukoju found in his study of Lagos, during this time it was not simply the lure of the modern city that pulled migrants to Lagos, rather it was the “pressure of the hinterland society that pushed many to Lagos.” The need for cash to pay taxes and to satisfy social responsibilities drove


20 Olukoju, *Liverpool of West Africa*, 176-77


many young men, both married and unattached, to the cities like Lagos, Ibadan, and Abeokuta.

As is common in times of economic hardship, crime in Lagos, and especially youth crimes, went up considerably as the pressures from economic and social survival took their toll and the city swelled with migrants.\textsuperscript{23} The rise in petty crime and counterfeit money was a continual problem from 1931 onwards in the colony.\textsuperscript{24} This increase in crime, coupled with the large number of homeless and destitute young boys and men in Lagos, fueled the “invention” of juvenile delinquency in Lagos during WWII and the creation of the Boys’ Club Movement, the subjects of Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.\textsuperscript{25} The need to reform these criminals, as well as prevent others from becoming criminals, moved some British and Nigerians towards sport as a solution to this growing problem. As discussed in Chapter 2, sport was though to teach discipline, hard work, respect, and sportsmanship to youth, all of which would combat the bad traits associated with juvenile delinquency. However, this solution tended to be used more after 1945 when the fortunes of Lagos and the economic situation turned for the better. Nevertheless, the increase in juvenile crime fueled the belief that urbanization was producing a deviant form of manhood and that the future of Nigerian men was in jeopardy.

\textsuperscript{23} Fourchard, “Invention,” 123. For example, convictions for under 17 increased from 120 in 1927-30, to 2537 in 1945-47. The convictions per year increased from 30 to 845 over the same time period, fueling the idea that youth crime was on the rise because they were socialized improperly in the city, and thus not becoming proper men.


\textsuperscript{25} Fourchard, “Invention,” also see Abosede George’s \textit{Making Modern Women}. 
When discussing the Great Depression, or any economic hardship for that matter, scholars can tend to focus on the economics of the situation and lose sight of the fact that regardless of hardship, people want to have fun and require entertainment. Lagos was no different. Despite the Great Depression, sporting entertainment in Lagos was a regular feature, especially amateur football, cricket, and secondary school sports. During this period, after-hours sporting clubs began to spring up in Lagos, organized around industries such as railroads, the United Africa Company, and other government posts. These clubs served the leisure pursuits of employed Nigerians and were supported by their industry employers.\textsuperscript{26} At this time, boxing was not yet a popular form of entertainment, and therefore it was not seen as something worthwhile for companies to promote in their sport clubs. In addition, boxing shows were more expensive to attend than football matches, and as a result, boxing was still the sport of elite Nigerians and British expatriates, not of the common worker. This started to change after 1936.

**Difficulties in Tracking the Rise of Boxing**

It is difficult to pinpoint when boxing emerged in Lagos. As John Blacking notes, the sources available to historians for sport in colonial Africa are slim and often very difficult to find.\textsuperscript{27} Since most sports-related issues were handled by civilians and not the government, they do not readily appear in the archives, nor did they take up

\textsuperscript{26} For example, see Lisa Lindsay, *Putting the Family on Track* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Michigan, 1996), especially Chapter Six.

\textsuperscript{27} John Blacking, “Games and Sport in Pre-Colonial African Societies” in William Baker and J.A. Mangan (eds) *Sport in Africa: Essays in Social History* (New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1987), 4. Blacking argues that part of the problem with sources lies in the fact that anthropologists and colonials were not always interested in sport and play of African societies, and neither were colonial officials.
considerable space in the paperwork for the running of the colony. While the exact genesis of boxing in Nigeria is unclear, the 1930s was the decade within which several currents came together, specifically the rise of sport as an integral part in the standards of health and education, as discussed in Chapter 2 which opened a space for boxing to develop. The drive to promote boxing rather than other sports can be seen coalescing in the debates over masculinity, character development, urbanization, juvenile delinquency, education, and ideals of sportsmanship.

Despite boxing clubs existing in Lagos from the early 1930s, the cost of attendance and the difficulty convincing Nigerians that boxing was a useful sport were obstacles in the way of its ultimate overwhelming popularity. Many boxing clubs, whether company clubs, Boys’ Clubs, or boxing-focused clubs, staged tournaments or promotions, but had a difficult time gaining adherents beyond European expatriates and elite Nigerians. While this situation was no doubt exacerbated by the economic difficulties of the Great Depression, many young Nigerians who migrated to the city had never seen boxing before and most likely did not want to waste money on a sport they had never seen or played. Watching a promotion was expensive, far more so than other sports in Lagos like cricket and soccer. Since boxing promotions did not seat thousands of fans, the cost of attendance was higher in order to pay expenses. Thus the tournaments that were held were not well attended, and neither were they held in a regular fashion. Moreover, the exigencies of the Great Depression curbed the number

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28 At the Nigeria National Archives in Ibadan, only two folios deal exclusively with boxing. The first folio is a collection set up to purchase a trophy for Hogan Bassey, who then became champion of the world, NAI COMCOL 1-15-3, 4631/3296/C.402, NBBC Public Collection 1957. The second folio deals with the government recognition of the Nigerian Boxing Club. NAI COMCOL 26 Series 1, 43588, Nigerian Boxing Club Lagos.
of tournaments that boxing clubs could stage due to the cost of putting on the show, and the high probability of losing money. Even more problematic was the lack of boxers to stage tournaments, since many were still in the beginning phases of their training and understanding of the sport.

But the most important hindrance to boxing beyond the financial aspects was the lack of popular Nigerian support. There was a mental disconnect between boxing’s aesthetic appeal and usefulness to the British on the one hand, and Nigerian parents’ and young men’s perception of the sport as nothing more than street fighting on the other. Many Nigerian boxers often commented that their parents were against them becoming boxers in the late 1940s and 1950s because they saw no social value in the sport. In fact, both of Nigeria’s future world champions, Hogan ‘Kid’ Bassey and Dick Tiger, boxed despite their parent’s continual objection, even after attaining world championships. Part of the apprehension for parents was that unlike colonial Western education, boxing did not bring with it social or economic mobility. For example, Carolyn Brown noticed that Eastern Nigerian Colliery workers spent considerable sums to pay for the education of their children, building schools, paying teachers’ salaries, and investing in scholarships during this and future eras, while not doing the same for promoting sports since it was assumed it would not pay off in the end. Education in Western style schools was seen as a more valuable investment of time and money,

29 Interview with the “Professor,” Olu Moses, Jerry Okorodudu, May/June 2012 and 2013 Lagos, Nigeria.
while sport was nothing more than play.\textsuperscript{32} Although parents objected to boxing, not only in the 1930s but to the present in Nigeria, as the 1930s progressed a new generation of colonial school-educated Nigerians with experience in its sporting ethos emerged. As was the case in other colonial cities, with them came a desire and a demand for more sports during leisure time.\textsuperscript{33}

Fighting was not seen as altogether useless, at times it was even necessary in a dangerous city like Lagos. In the cartoon strip “Ferdinand,” which ran daily in the \textit{West African Pilot (WAP)} in Lagos in the late 1930s, the titular character was an adept fencer and boxer. The caption reads, “Ferdinand is adept at Fencing and Boxing. Moral: If you cannot fence, then box because all is fair in war.”\textsuperscript{34} It is clear that fencing came first – a sophisticated upper-class sport, with defined rules and an air of civility—whereas the “boxing” part of the cartoon presented a free-for-all fight, without gentlemanly conduct or rules. As one can see from the cartoon, the boxing begins once all civility has left the competition. Many Nigerians found European boxing to be much the same, not a civilized import but a brutal contest with no cultural relevance. Fighting was a last resort.

As the Depression continued, and crime and unemployment took their toll, a crisis of masculinity formed in the city. Sport was seen to alleviate such concerns. For example, as the \textit{Nigerian Observer} noted in 1935, “We have a general interest in sports

\begin{footnotes}
\item[32] Ibid.
\item[33] For example see Lisa Lindsay, \textit{Putting the Family on Track}; Peter Alegi, \textit{Laduma!: soccer, politics, and society in South Africa, from its origins to 2010} (Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2010); Laura Fair, \textit{Pastimes and politics: culture, community, and identity in post-abolition urban Zanzibar, 1890-1945} (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001); Phyllis Martin, \textit{Leisure and society in colonial Brazzaville} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), to name a few.
\item[34] \textit{WAP}, (Lagos, Nigeria), Jan 7 1938.
\end{footnotes}
and consider them necessary to the growth and expansion of not only the physical life of any community but essential to the fostering of good feeling amongst the various units and groups of a community.\textsuperscript{35} Manhood itself was also at stake. “Quit you like men! Be strong in character! Honesty pays, everywhere and anywhere. It matters not whether it be at cricket, teams, or in any of our activities.”\textsuperscript{36} The lessons of sport transcended the playing field and ring and were necessary for the development of character in the city. While the benefits of sport in general to the development of proper manhood were already perceived, the usefulness of boxing specifically was not yet appreciated by the Nigerian public. This would all change in 1938, with the emergence of “Thunderbolt” Williams.

Figure 3-1. Cartoon of Ferdinand in the \textit{WAP}. After Ferdinand tries fencing, the competition turns to punching between foes. \textit{WAP} January 7, 1938. Courtesy of the National Archives of Nigeria.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Nigerian Observer}, (Lagos, Nigeria), July 27, 1935.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
Similar to other African communities during this time, Lagosians took to creating and running boxing and other sport clubs as an entrepreneurial venture.\textsuperscript{37} In fact, sports entrepreneurship was one of the few avenues that Nigerians could enter, since many other business ventures were either dominated by or restricted to Europeans, like import/export trade.\textsuperscript{38} As Makinde found, the first boxing clubs were run not by Europeans but by Nigerians. One of the very first clubs to open in Lagos was the International Boxing and Sporting Club in 1930, run by a Nigerian named “Kid Davies.” Davies himself was a boxer and a manager in the 1930s, and claimed that he had fought all over Europe and America for over twenty years, where he met other black boxers like Senegalese World Champion Battling Siki, Nigerian Tiger Flowers, and American Harry Wills.\textsuperscript{39} His reputation for being a boxing coach and mentor attracted local boxers to his club for lessons and training. His stable included an eclectic group of boxers, many who were local favorites, including Nigerians Bomb Dawodu, Al Okonkwo, and Domingo Bailey, but he also had foreign members like West Indian Jack O’Brun and Sierra Leonean Wellington Coker.\textsuperscript{40}

However, before 1936, boxing clubs were few and far between and there were neither enough boxers nor clubs to stage regular competitions which might arouse


\textsuperscript{38} Ayodeji Olukoju, \textit{Liverpool}, 169-176.

\textsuperscript{39} Makinde, \textit{Dick Tiger}, 15.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
interest in the sport. Most did not have proper equipment or even a ring, focusing more on the health and training of their members than on punching, sparring, or competing.⁴¹ A 1937 article in the WAP lamented the sorry state of boxing, commenting that “As far as I know, boxing in Nigeria is suffering from fever. The reason for this is apparent. It may either be that boxing authorities have lost their interest in the fame or that they are not doing their duties.”⁴² Those at the center of Lagosian boxing were not seeing the results they desired. The blame was placed squarely on the promoters of boxing for not drawing crowds. The attendance at shows was small and the influx of new boxers was slow to materialize. This changed after 1938, when the blame shifted to the Nigerian fans themselves. Regardless, promoters decided that in order for boxing to catch on, more shows and exposure were necessary.

Boxing shows and tournaments in Lagos before 1938 were haphazard and infrequent. By 1936, after a lull in the number of local boxing promotions, the Lagos Boxing Club began staging monthly competitions including a popular show on 11 August 1936 in an effort to drum up support for boxing.⁴³ An interesting tactic to elicit support was to advertise which prominent white officials were to be present at the event to show that the British at least found boxing a worthwhile form of entertainment and

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⁴¹ “Lagos Boxing Club – To-night’s Boxing Tournament” NDT (Lagos, Nigeria) Nov. 5, 1936. This particular tournament was held in order to make money for new equipment for the club.


⁴³ “Boxing at Metropole – Williams Knocks out Dawodu” NDT (Lagos, Nigeria), Aug. 12, 1936. Contestants participated in six total fights for this event, and “the crowd given a great display of pugilism.” Reggie “The Thunderbolt” knocked Dawodu down 5 times in round one, which led to the judgement that Dawodu was out of shape. Young Bassey lost a tooth in an accidental head butt and had to retire in his match due to excessive pain. Bob Savage beat Paul Akuson when Akuson fouled 3 times and was disqualified. The fans booed and felt cheated from a good show, according to the news coverage.
Another tactic was the use of well-known venues. Many promotions before the war were staged at the Hotel Metropole’s rooftop, a popular Lagos location for social gatherings, dances, and by the end of the decade, boxing. Having the promotions outdoors led to some issues with inclement weather. Some tournaments were canceled due to rains that made the ring slippery and dangerous to fight. Despite the rain and with the advertising of the well-known personalities in attendance, boxing shows started to attract more people.

The Lagos Boxing Club also began running ads to promote their club and tournaments, listing fighters’ names as a way to spread word about them. But the newspaper promotion allowed for many that did not have the means to attend in person to at least read about the results of the matches in detail. The ads would include

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44 “Lagos Boxing Club – To-night’s Boxing Tournament” NDT (Lagos, Nigeria) Nov. 5, 1936. This particular event was watched by Commander A.V.P. Ivey at the Hotel Metropole.

45 Ibid.

46 “Boxing – Wet night At Hotel Metropole” NDT (Lagos, Nigeria) July 16, 1937. The ring was too slippery and only a small crowd came due to the weather. The six fights that night featured Jim Samuel, Jackie Louis, Kid Richard, Billy Petrolle, Red Ayuk, Jack Davies, Teddy McGowan, Joe Stephens, Darkie Brown, and London Kid (Ghana).

47 For example, see “Lagos Boxing Club Presents” NDT (Lagos, Nigeria) Nov. 13, 1936. Attending this promotion were such notables as Vice Admiral F Tottenham, and the event was supported by Commander A.V.P. Ivey, the Director of Marine. The matches included Strawweight Kid Richard vs AC Petrolle, Middleweight Stoker Thorne vs Stoker Jones, Waterweight Engine Room Artificer Harris vs Able Seaman Gibson, Middleweight Joe Spencer vs Bobby Keegan (Nigerian), Light Heavy Mechanican Rogers vs Stoker Bannister. Cost of Admission for Ringside seat was 3/-, unreserved seats 2/-.

48 “Boxing” NDT (Lagos, Nigeria) Nov. 16, 1936. The newspapers noted “record breaking attendance” for the event in which Bob Savage draws Paul Akusan. In the flyweight fight between Kid Arthur and Jonney Bassey, Kid Arthur fought bravely but lost on points. Red Ayuk compelled his opponent, Kiddy Layeni, to give up in the second round. “Reggie Williams next met Kid Howard. Howard was a new comer to the local ring but proved to be a rather plucky and stubborn fighter. Unfortunately for Williams, he had not recovered from the injury to his middle finger during a recent practice and all the time he was fighting, his right hand was in a bandage in the glove. That he even took to the ring at all that night was indeed a proof of his pluck and sportsmanlike spirit, and in spite of his injury he managed to come off a deserving winner on points. Howard also earned the praises of the crowd by his admirable gameness.” Howard was, however, accused of too much clinching to get away from the heavy attack of Williams. The big fight of the night was Bob Savage and Paul Akusan who were both vociferously cheered by the crowd. Akusan
details such as the fact that Bob Savage and Paul Akusan were both vociferously cheered by the crowd at a promotion on November 1936. Akusan was the lighter but more experienced fighter while Savage was “amply supplied by his courage, pertinacity, and sheer physical strength.”\(^{49}\) It must not be forgotten though, that these early shows and events, like when the *HMS Amphion* sent crew members to fight against the Lagos Boxing Club in late 1936, were “easily the first of [their] kind in Lagos” to have “record breaking attendance.”\(^{50}\) Boxing shows were still infrequent and their lack of exposure to Lagosians hindered the development of boxing. But as the reporting of boxing increased, so did talk of the fights themselves, the fighters and their styles, and debates over who was going to win.

The catalyst for change in boxing attendance and popularity occurred with the arrival of Nnamdi Azikiwe (Zik) to Lagos, and his subsequent creation of a sporting newspaper culture in Lagos through his newspaper, *The West African Pilot (WAP)*. The popularity of Azikiwe’s paper with young urban Nigerians--that is, the growing urban sporting class-- combined with Azikiwe’s love for sport and especially boxing, started boxing’s rise in social visibility and stature. Furthermore, as Fred Omu argues, the arrival of the *WAP* in 1937 sparked a newspaper war whose competition fueled a rapid expansion of the newspaper industry.\(^{51}\) Following Charles Ambler, I add that on top of

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\(^{49}\) Ibid.

\(^{50}\) “Lagos Boxing Club-Friday Nights Show,” *NDT* (Lagos, Nigeria), Nov. 16, 1936.

the political critiques of these newspapers, another driving innovation that propelled and
sold newspapers in Nigeria was the reporting on sport and leisure.\textsuperscript{52} At a time before
radio was widespread in Nigeria, most Nigerians relied on newspapers and word of
mouth to learn of local and international sporting news. During the late 1930s, in part
because of the newspaper battle between the \textit{WAP} and the \textit{NDT}, sport, boxing, and
newspapers matured and the popularity of boxing rose as a result.

\textbf{Newspaper Wars: \textit{The Daily Times}, Lagos, and the \textit{WAP}}

By analyzing how Africans read and contextualized sporting news, we can get a
better grasp of how newspapers impacted what Ambler calls “the negotiation with
modernity,” as well as how they helped to develop and spread “new forms of leisure” in
African cities, like boxing.\textsuperscript{53} By focusing on the consumption of newspapers, rather than
the production, we can gauge how African audiences wanted news that focused on
leisure, entertainment, and sport and their importance to life in the city.\textsuperscript{54} Readers
increasingly turned to newspapers in the 1930s and ‘40s for entertainment, as well as
for information that could be shared and debated with friends. In fact, reading, as Luise
White notes, may not have been a silent or personal affair, as newspapers were
frequently read aloud: “newspaper reading in Africa is a social event.”\textsuperscript{55} Nigeria was no
different and by the 1930s, an emerging class of clerks and educated Nigerians eagerly
consumed, discussed, and debated news and sports.

\textsuperscript{52} Charles Ambler, “Mass Media and Leisure in Africa,” \textit{The International Journal of African Historical}

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 120.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid

\textsuperscript{55} Luise White, \textit{Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa} (Berkeley, 2000), 252.
Before 1926 there was not one permanent daily newspaper in Lagos.\textsuperscript{56} The creation of \textit{The Daily Times} (henceforth \textit{NDT}) in 1926 was one of the major reasons for the increased popularity of sport in Lagos the late 1920s and early 1930s, although that was not the intent of the founders of the paper. The \textit{NDT} was, in the words of Obafemi Awolowo, the first Premier of the Western Region, “an unpardonably dull journalistic and literary product…[filled with] colourless news.”\textsuperscript{57} As Fred Omu argues, from 1926 onwards, daily newspapers were enthusiastically consumed by Lagosians, with the nine new daily newspapers between 1926 and 1936 selling roughly 10,000 copies a day.\textsuperscript{58} The \textit{NDT} was the most popular daily newspaper from the end of the 1920s, selling at its high point in 1936 roughly 6,000 copies a day.\textsuperscript{59} Lagosian daily newspapers started to report more regularly on sporting events, although they mostly focused on white European sporting activities like cricket, football, or horse racing. As such, the \textit{NDT} gave very little to no photographs of sport. The 1937 arrival of Nnamdi Azikiwe and his new newspaper \textit{The West African Pilot} dethroned the \textit{NDT} as Lagos’ most popular newspaper and marked “the beginning of a new era” in Nigerian journalism, according to Omu, where the \textit{WAP} was “an effective purveyor of popular views and sentiments.”\textsuperscript{60} As Pauline Baker argues, the \textit{WAP} changed how newspapers were operated in Nigeria, with the focus on social equality and human interest stories that drove newspaper from

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\textsuperscript{56} Omu, 85-86.
\textsuperscript{57} Obafemi Awolowo, \textit{Awo: the autobiography of Chief Obafemi Awolowo} (Cambridge: University Press, 1960), 82.
\textsuperscript{58} Omu, 85-86.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, 240.
\end{flushleft}
an elite enterprise to one “popularized for mass consumption.”

Similar to Nigeria in the 1930s, one of the major factors in the spread of sport, and boxing, in the United States at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the increased circulation of newspapers devoted to sport.

Philip Zachernuk argues that the WAP’s popularity stemmed mostly from its appeal to an increasingly educated class of clerks and an enlarged class of primary school graduates who could read. In addition, I argue that this class of clerks and educated Nigerians was also exposed to British school sporting culture and clamored for more information about local and international sports in their daily news.

The WAP began in November 1937 with an initial circulation of 5,000 copies. Within two months this number grew to over 6,000 a day, and by the end of the first year the WAP was selling over 9,200 copies a day. By 1938 the WAP’s circulation was twice that of its leading daily competitor, the NDT, and thrice that of the Daily News. It became the widest circulated paper in West Africa by the 1940s, amassing a staggering

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62 Elliot Gorn locates the spread of boxing through the newspapers and how newspapers were integral in reporting the sports of the day. See Elliot Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986). Also see Thomas Hietala, *The fight of the century: Jack Johnson, Joe Louis, and the struggle for racial equality* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2002).


64 Azikiwe came to Nigeria after initially being an editor in 1937, the *African Morning Post* published an essay by union leader I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, entitled “Has the African a God?” that criticized the colonial government and the Vatican too harshly, causing a civil suit of libel against Azikiwe. He was convicted, but later acquitted on appeal. Toyin Falola, *The History of Nigeria*. (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1999), 87.

65 Ibid., 264.

66 Ibid., 268.
20,000 copies a day.\textsuperscript{67} As Baker notes, in 1921 only 10% of the Lagosian population were literate, but by 1951 more than 48% were literate.\textsuperscript{68} But Lagosians were not the \textit{WAP}'s only readers, as Azikiwe set up the \textit{WAP} in four other cities after 1940.\textsuperscript{69} Carolyn Brown found that after 1937 the \textit{WAP} was read “avidly” by Enugu clerks. According to her study, the paper was read by “40% of its 13,000 inhabitants,” which meant that Azikiwe’s ideas reached a large readership outside Lagos.\textsuperscript{70} No doubt this educated class enjoyed the \textit{WAP}'s scathing critiques of colonial policies and inequalities.\textsuperscript{71} Yet, political commentary cannot be the lone cause of the rise of the \textit{WAP}. Indeed, the \textit{WAP} also appealed to this new educated class’ urban lifestyle and growing families with its entertainment content: a sports page, a woman’s page, and a children’s page. In order to understand how the \textit{WAP} became so popular, one must understand the motives of its driving force, Nnamdi Azikiwe, and how his love of sport and sportsmanship guided his newspaper production.

Nnamdi Azikiwe was an avid sports fan and participant from his childhood. He was a former amateur boxer and passionate boxing supporter. During his studies in journalism in the United States in the 1920s, he boxed as an amateur and even tried his hand at being a professional. Although he gave up boxing after being knocked out, he enjoyed the sport immensely and believed that boxing would play an important role in

\textsuperscript{67} Baker, 80.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 81.

\textsuperscript{69} Omu, 245.

\textsuperscript{70} Carolyn Brown, \textit{We Were All Slaves}, 180.

the development of men in Nigeria. He believed that sport, like life, had rules one must obey, and that sportsmanship and honesty were linked to success in all aspects of life, especially politics. To that end, Azikiwe sponsored many sporting events by donating trophies and built athletic and football stadiums around Lagos and its environs in order to spread the ethos of sportsmanship to all.

Two of his most lasting creations were instrumental in the spread of boxing. One was *The West African Pilot (WAP)*, created by Azikiwe in 1937, which consistently featured articles about boxing matches and more importantly, pictures of boxers, right from the very first edition. The second was the multiethnic sporting clubs known as the Zik’s Athletic Club (ZAC). These clubs, many equipped with a boxing ring, grew quickly and spread his message of sportsmanship across Nigeria with every club that opened. For Azikiwe, and many like him, sport for youth, male and female, was needed to uplift the “Nigerian race” to its full potential. The lessons learned in sporting situations transcended those found in the classroom.

Having recently come from the Gold Coast (present day Ghana), where boxing was popular in the 1930s, he was disappointed that boxing had not taken hold with Nigerians as it had in the Gold Coast. In order to change this, Azikiwe decided to focus

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73 Ibid. 404 and 414-416.


his sporting section of the *WAP* on the exploits of black athletes at home and abroad. This emphasis on black athletes can be seen in the first seven editions of the *WAP*, in which the only pictures in the “Sports Topics” page featured famous black boxers, the first being Nigeria’s featherweight champion Domingo Bailey.\(^{77}\) Included in this list of boxing pictures was African American Boxing Heavyweight Champion Joe Louis, whose picture was a frequent feature of the *WAP* in the first year and throughout his career into the late 1940s. It is reasonable to assume that this was influenced by not only Azikiwe’s love for the sport, but also because boxing was the only sport where black athletes made large sums of money, had international exposure, and were world champions. Just as Emmanuel Akyeampong found in his study of boxing in the Gold Coast, the international success of Joe Louis was paramount to the diffusion of boxing in Nigeria, as his example showed the heights that black athletes could attain.\(^{78}\)

**Joe Louis, Boxing Idol**

Two important additions to newspapers that further fueled Lagosian interest in boxing was the fact that African American Joe Louis was Heavyweight Champion of the World, and that advertisements depicting sports and health now included boxing. The


\(^{78}\) Emmanuel Akyeampong, “Bukom and the Social History of Boxing in Accra” pp. 39-60, 45.
inclusion of more pictures of athletes and boxers in the newspapers made boxing more visible in colonial society. Moreover, the directing of advertisements at Africans, and the use of sporting and boxing themes to sell products, also resulted in the diffusion of boxing to a wider audience. This section will look at both Louis and advertisements to show how after 1937 through WWII, boxing became more ingrained and present in Lagos, as well as in the minds of Nigerians.

As mentioned above, from the start of the *WAP*, Azikiwe included pictures of the African American World Heavyweight Boxing Champion Joe Louis, who held the title from 1936-1948. Boxing’s heavyweight champion has always been the pinnacle of the sport, or in the words of Gerald Early and Clarence George, “The Emperor of Masculinity.” Commenting on American society, Eldridge Cleaver observed that “The

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boxing ring is the ultimate focus of masculinity in America, the two-fisted testing ground of manhood, and the heavyweight champion, as a symbol, is the real Mr. America."\(^{80}\)

This type of homage to boxing was not located solely in America, but was present in many countries in Europe and especially Britain. By the 1950s, boxing would hold a similar place in Nigeria, impacting what Roberts and Smith referred to as social “notions of masculinity and cultural currency.”\(^{81}\) Paving the way in the 1930s and ‘40s for such adulation of the prizefighter was Louis, who showed Nigerians an example of a famous, healthy, muscular idol.

Figure 3-3. Joe Louis’ picture in the first edition of the WAP. WAP Nov. 25, 1937. Courtesy of the National Archives of Nigeria.

Louis as champion was an inspiration to many Africans and Nigerians.\(^{82}\) As the NDT noted in 1942, “We all know how good Joe Louis is and that is why he has become


\(^{82}\) Several interviews of boxers from the 1950s and 1960s credit Joe Louis as one of their inspirations. Interview with Olu Moses and Abraham Adeyemi Jones, Lagos, Nigeria, May/June 2012 and May 2013.
one of the most popular of all champions, cheered by white and black alike.”

Future Nigerian World Featherweight Champion Hogan ‘Kid’ Bassey said on numerous occasions that Joe Louis was his personal hero, for his good works inspired Africans and African Americans alike. In fact, Bassey told reporters in interviews that he wanted to fight at Madison Square Gardens in New York where his childhood idol Joe Louis used to fight. As the WAP reported in 1957, Bassey’s “ambition is to be introduced to Joe Louis, former world heavyweight champion. ‘I read all about him back in 1943 when he was the heavyweight champion. He was my idol. He was the idol of all Africa. I wanted to become a fighter like he was.'” Louis’ impact was made possible by his appearance in Lagosian newspapers and films. Nigerian Dick Tiger, future World Middleweight Champion, recalled watching films of Louis when he was young and being inspired to fight like him. Furthermore, Azikiwe and the WAP made sure that readers knew that Louis was in fact a “Negro” champion by continually emphasizing it in the paper. His fights were shown in Nigerian theatres, and his ability to dress in expensive or high class clothing and be seen with whites, made him an example of the social heights one could attain through boxing. Reggie Williams, Nigerian boxing champion

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84 Bassey, *Bassey on Boxing*.


88 WAP (Lagos, Nigeria) December 7, 1937.

89 Pictures of Joe Louis were frequent in Nigerian newspapers in the 1930s. For example, see NDT 17th July 1936 To-days Pictures – section of pictures included a Picture of Joe Louis in tank top and gloves.
during the interwar period, remarked that Nigerians might one day be good boxers for racial reasons, linking Nigerian boxers to Louis. “We can by means of syllogism prove that Nigerians are good boxers. The proof is as follows: Major Premise: American Negroes [like Louis] are good boxers. Minor Premise: Nigerians are Negroid. Conclusion: Nigerians may be good boxers.” The importance of Louis as a ground breaking role model cannot be underestimated and his impact on the Atlantic world of boxing is discussed further in Chapter 6.

Figure 3-4. One of the first photos of Joe Louis appearing in the WAP. The caption reads “Joe Louis, World Heavyweight Boxing Champion. He is a Negro”. WAP December 7, 1937. Courtesy of the National Archives of Nigeria.

Sport, Health, and Advertisements in Newspapers

The WAP ushered in a new wave of newspapers, and with it the possibility to advertise to a new class of educated Africans. At the same time, as sports like boxing took on more importance in Lagos after 1937, advertisements began to use the theme

punching announcing his recent defeat at the hands of Max Schmelling. And then below is a picture of Max Schmeling in boxing trunk.

90 “Boxing in Nigeria” WAP (Lagos, Nigeria) Dec 17, 1937.
of sports to sell health and other luxury products to Nigerians rather than simply whites. Products like Andrew Liver Salts, for example, began to showcase Africans as the main characters of their ads, focusing on the idea that taking such products could aid in the rejuvenation of sapped energy. Ads using boxing and sport in this time period were combining the more modern ethos of sport with older ideals of health in the colonies, creating an image of the ultimate body best able to survive and thrive in the colonial African setting. The ads steadily changed to include more ads directed towards Nigerians, and yet used the same language and rhetoric as it did for whites: that African bodies were being sapped of energy from an unforgiving environment, that strong bodies were the defense for the tropical climate, and that sporting success depended on such products.

As Timothy Burke demonstrates, products like Lifebuoy Soap, among others, continually used the narrative that success at work followed from being healthy and strong men to sell products. However, unlike ads directed to whites, these new ads directed at African consumers continually linked their products to a new urban “civilized” African, and yet carefully never promised make them equal. Building on this, I argue that these successful men also wanted enough energy to participate in sporting competitions and activities after work, something that advertisers picked up on in the 1930s. This theme and rhetoric in ads was consistent in all Nigerian newspapers well into the 1960s.

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92 For a comparable example, see Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*, Chapter 3 and 99.
Many ads throughout the colonial period used sport to sell products from tonics to bicycles to toothpaste to energy drinks – all with the goal of promoting health and vitality to combat the debilitating effects of the tropics. Boxing was already a theme for selling products to whites in Nigeria. For example, in the 1930s, advertisements in Nigeria for Mentholatum were accompanied by pictures of ex-World Flyweight boxing champion Jimmy Wilde’s picture and recommendation (Figure 2-5). Wilde, from England, was well known to British officials and elite Nigerians. In fact, a famous boxer from Lagos in the 1940s named himself Sammy Wilde after Jimmy, adopting his last name as sign of respect as well as associating himself with his attributes. Jimmy Wilde endorsed Mentholatum as having the ability to cure colds, but also as “healing” pain and irritation.

Another ad depicting boxing was also run the 1930s for Andrews Salts, a tonic sold widely in Nigeria and West Africa designed to clear one’s system of “impurities.” The effect was “lasting energy” and “keeps you fit.” In the Andrews’ ad, an overweight and perspiring colonial administrator looks through a window to see a very fit, very muscular white male punching a speed bag and seemingly happy and full of energy. Like the Mentholatum ad, this ad also links the healthy body to sportsmen, while simultaneously endorsing boxing as a worthwhile sporting pursuit to keep fit and build character.

Nigerian males did not wholeheartedly accept all the rhetoric of the British at face value. Concerns over money and status, as well as finding a suitable woman, remained

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93 For a more detailed explanation of the importance of the naming culture of boxers, especially in Nigeria, see Chapter Three. The impact of Sammy Wilde in Nigeria and later Liverpool is the subject of Chapter Four.
Figure 3-5. Advertisement for Mentholatum featuring well-known British Flyweight Champion Jimmy Wilde. Wilde also appeared in several films on how to box and how to protect oneself using “the noble art of self-defence.” *NDT* July 27, 1935. Courtesy of the National Archives of Nigeria.

Figure 3-6. Advertisement for Andrews Liver Salts featuring a white, muscular, fit boxer. He is being watched by an out of shape and what appears to be out of energy colonial administrator. *NDT* October 3, 1936. Courtesy of the National Archives of Nigeria.
central to manliness in the interwar years. Advertisers knew this and thus played on Nigerian males’ fear of not being manly enough. An ad for Clotabs in 1936 asked “Why are some men so Popular?”:

Why are some men always the centre of attraction – admired by women – sought after by friends – singled for promotion at work? It is because they are vibrant with personal magnetism and vitality. They keep the inner fire of radiant well-being steadily glowing. Their fine figures, their sparkling eyes and high spirits all well from the abounding life and energy which make them so attractive. They have found that the secret to glowing health is a regular course of Clotabs.⁹⁴

Clotabs described the envy of many men for someone they possibly knew and someone they themselves wanted to be. But as men they also felt they had to attain a muscular body, and local advertisements started more and more during the war years to focus on the male physique while advertising their products. Clotabs in 1940 started showing shirtless African males with large muscles in their ads. By taking two pills, the ad promises, one can “fill out” the muscles and “broaden” the chest to “Build a manly body!”⁹⁵

Figure 3-7. Ad for Clotabs found in the 1930s and 1940s in Nigerian newspapers. An example of the changing shape of ads during this time as concerns over health and manliness. NDT January 20, 1941. Courtesy of the National Archives of Nigeria.

⁹⁴ “Why are some men so Popular?” NDT (Lagos, Nigeria) August 15, 1936.

⁹⁵ “Clotabs Brand Halibut Liver Oil Extract Tabs” NDT (Lagos, Nigeria) Nov. 11, 1940. Underline in original.
Azikiwe believed his amateur boxing and amateur sports background as a youth and student shaped him into man. Physical fitness was a major concern in interwar Britain, and some of that anxiety came into Nigeria, especially as a new educated middle-class was growing and losing its physical fitness. Azikiwe felt that too much education for the mind and not enough for the body was taking its toll on Nigerian manhood: “one cannot walk along any business street in any city without noticing that the average business man is not conspicuous for his athletic appearance…True, he may look all right in his office or on change, but he is not the person who would be selected to represent the manhood of his city.” Neither the business man nor Nigerians working as civil servants or in office jobs in Lagos were living up to the ideal male physique, much less could represent the Nigerian race. The growing demand for sport and sports clubs was the social response to this concern. “It is impossible to exaggerate the importance and desirability of cultivating physical fitness.” In order to survive the city, and succeed in life, physical fitness was paramount to a rising generation. Azikiwe felt sport, and boxing in particular, “Seem[ed] to be the only obvious means of securing Fitness which is really a matter of will as well as body, of moral effort as well as physical exercise.” Even King George VI of Britain himself said to his African Empire, “There is nothing saner and worthier of every African than to welcome such athletic organization with the spirit of co-operation…we must always remember that our bodies are the instruments with which we have to work. They too, need

96 Azikiwe, My Odyssey, Chapter Nine.
97 “Aims of Zik’s Athletic Club Are Expounded” WAP (Lagos, Nigeria) Apr 13, 1938.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
education if we are to play our part in the life of our family and of our country." The body was the second component of education in that it must also be trained, like the mind, and its classrooms were the fields, pitches, and rings. Soon, the boxer would become the epitome of physical fitness.

During the 1940s advertisements such as the Clotabs ads were using boxing to promote products for health directly to Africans. Another example was an advertisement for Maclean’s Toothpaste that started using boxing in its ads during the war. The ad, which ran throughout the 1940s and early 1950s, depicted two Africans boxing in the ring, and a close-up of one of them with perfect teeth, asking “did you clean your teeth today?” to which the boxer replied, “Better still I Maclean them!” Although interesting and ironic that a boxer whose face is punched and is therefore less likely to have a full set of teeth was used to advertise toothpaste, a white and clean full set of teeth was part of the ensemble of a healthy body, and something that was a physical signal of class difference, as lower classed Africans were less likely to have clean or full set.

Figure 3-8. Ad for Maclean Toothpaste using a boxer. NDT January 7, 1942. Courtesy of the National Archives of Nigeria.

100 Quoted in Ibid.

101 NDT (Lagos, Nigeria), December 24, 1940.
Advertising promoted boxing stars and heroes as much as it did the product. Moreover, they often promoted colonial “modern” products, thereby linking sporting success to the modern man to increased consumption. As mentioned before, a star who resonated with many Nigerians was American World Heavyweight Boxing Champion Joe Louis. Starting in the early 1940s, Joe Louis was the center of bicycle ads for Dayton Cycles in Nigeria, where he represented “A Picture of Strength.” Louis was drawn in caricature, but his likeness was well known in many parts of Africa through his fight films and appearances in the newspaper. His picture in the Dayton ad was of him on the bike in a suit and tie, thus linking him to modern dress and demonstrating how his stature and fame allows him to consume modern products.

Figure 3-9. Ad using a caricature of Joe Louis. This “Picture of Strength” was used to sell bicycles in British colonial Africa. *Daily Service*, September 23, 1949. Courtesy of the National Archives of Nigeria.

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102 Interview with Abraham Adeyemi Jones, June 2013, Lagos, Nigeria. Jones used to keep pictures of Louis. Also, as mentioned above, Dick Tiger and Hogan Bassey both idolized Joe Louis before they started boxing.
Zik’s Athletic Clubs

At the same time that newspapers and advertisements were bringing boxing to a wider audience, local sports clubs were springing up all over Lagos. By the late 1930s, large corporations and employers like the Railways “attempted to organize leisure activities for workers that would uplift their minds, harden their bodies and foster networks of similarly ‘respectable’ working men.”103 In fact, the Railways formed a football club in 1936 to compete in the Lagos African Football Association.104

Azikiwe himself felt firsthand the ethnic tension in Nigeria when he returned to Lagos in 1936 and was denied entry into the Yoruba Tennis Club on the basis of his Igbo ethnicity.105 Nevertheless, Azikiwe wanted to promote sportmanship and his clubs in Lagos would offer all sports in order to do so. “The Club is optimistic of the future, and hopes that in the course of time, its existence will make it possible to set up championship Cups and Prizes that will be competed annually by Africans, and people of African descent.”106 Zik’s Athletic Clubs (ZACs) wanted to foster “fraternal companionship, camaraderie, and co-operation” among races and classes in Nigeria, and felt that sport was one place where such barriers could be overcome through sportmanship and character.107 As the WAP noted in 1938, “The [Zik’s Athletic] Club has also the furtherance of the spirit of fellowship and sportmanship not among the

103 Lisa Lindsey, *Putting the Family on Track*, 310.
104 Ibid., 312.
105 Azikiwe, 406-407.
106 “New Zik’s Athletic Club is Now Formed to Foster Sportmanship” *WAP* (Lagos, Nigeria) Apr. 4, 1938.
107 “Aims of Zik’s Athletic Club Are Expounded” *WAP* (Lagos, Nigeria), Apr. 13, 1938.
Africans in particular, but also among all races and classes of people in general.” A major problem was the inter-tribal tensions in Lagos, something that would hinder and trouble Nigerian politics to the present, but especially important to the buildup to independence in 1960, the subject of Chapter 8.

Azikiwe, in his address to “Sports Enthusiasts” about the opening of the first ZAC, had “stressed the importance of cultivating physical efficiency as we as Africans, as a nation, get along in the pursuit of our mental emancipation.” Notice the rhetoric being used by Azikiwe, linking the mental emancipation from colonialism with the need for physical efficiency. In Azikiwe’s mind, these needs worked together. But at this time when sports promotion, news, and clubs were in their infancy, such a distinction lacked a standard bearer, or in other words, a local Joe Louis who epitomized these ideas in the flesh. Luckily for Azikiwe, he did not have to wait long, as in 1937 another Nigerian came to the fore, boxer Reggie “Thunderbolt” Williams, who, like Azikiwe, also promoted boxing for both the physical and mental benefits, and because boxing shaped proper men.


Williams was the face of boxing in Lagos before the war and as such he influenced perceptions of the male body and masculinity, as well as helped popularize boxing. Furthermore, since he was one of the most skilled boxers in Lagos and had no equal in Nigeria, he clamored for matches against boxers from the Gold Coast to prove his mettle. To Nigerians at home these matches were seen as much more: as a way to

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108 “New Zik’s Athletic Club is Now Formed to Foster Sportsmanship” WAP (Lagos, Nigeria) Apr. 4 1938.

109 “Inaugural Meeting of Zik’s Athletic Club is Encouraging” WAP (Lagos, Nigeria) Apr. 23, 1938.
measure which colony had progressed faster and which was producing stronger men.
These boxing competitions became more frequent during the 1940s and '50s, and the first one in 1938 set the precedent for using boxing as the gauge of Nigerian progress, manhood, and pride.

Reggie “Thunderbolt” Williams was one of the most well-known Lagosian boxers before the Second World War, and through him Lagos had its first real local boxing star similar to Joe Louis. He was a muscular man with a “gigantic stature,” a fierce competitor, a gentleman, and an avid sportsman. As a “scientific” boxer, Williams learned proper techniques, tactics, and the British style of fighting that depended on gentlemanly conduct in the ring. He was also a man of “character,” possessing the finer points that were necessary to becoming a gentleman – honesty, sportsmanlike conduct, and humility. In fact, Williams would later immigrate to Britain during WWII and was known there as the “African Hercules” because of his height and sculpted muscular physique. He could be seen running around Lagos Island in the interwar years with a following of boxers from the Lagos Boxing Club to get in their daily “road work.”

“He is indefatigable. Every evening at 5:15 pm I see him having practices with a few members of his Club. He is the Charles Atlas of Nigeria. His physical culture arouses physical instincts. He has gigantic stature and he is bodily darling.” He actively advocated

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110 “Boxing in Nigeria” WAP (Lagos, Nigeria), Dec. 17, 1937. Williams started boxing in the late 1920s and was, by the mid-1930s, the head trainer at the Lagos Boxing Club.

111 For a detailed description of British boxing styles that continued after WWI, see Kasia Boddy, “‘A Straight Left against a Slogging Ruffian’: National Boxing Styles in the Years Preceding the First World War,” Journal of Historical Sociology 24:4 (2011), 428–450.

112 Road work refers to a boxer’s running regiment as part of their overall fitness training. Most boxers ran early in the morning before work, however Williams and his friends ran after the workday was over.

other Lagosians and Nigerians the value of boxing for young men, its use for racial uplift under oppressive colonialism, and the importance of physical training to improve what he saw as a lack of “Nigerian manhood.” By building healthy, strong, muscular bodies through boxing, Williams believed that Nigerians would achieve a sense of manhood presently lacking.

He tried repeatedly to get Lagosians to come and watch his fights and training sessions in order to drum up excitement for the sport, announcing open sessions in the WAP. For example, the Lagos Boxing Club staged a boxing display for Lagosians in November 1937, which included some exercises, shadow boxing, and exhibition matches for all to see. Many left “impressed” by the weight lifting display made by Olics Kassim, who made it “look easy,” along with “other strong exercises which naturally aroused physical instincts.” They then had two exhibition matches that were good displays of the science and strength of boxing. Williams believed that the only thing stopping boxing from becoming popular was its lack of exposure, and so he wanted to get as much press and people watching his training and fights as possible.

Williams was interested in promoting boxing for reasons that went beyond those of the ring. He desired to make “strong men” in Nigeria and felt that boxing was able to do this better than other sports. Reggie Williams was praised for his efforts to grow boxing in Lagos by the WAP:

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115 “Boxers work out at Metropole” WAP (Lagos, Nigeria), Nov. 30, 1937.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
Reggie Williams is a darling. He has spent sleepless nights brooding over how he might train strong men in his land. Creating strong men would make them able to endure the rigors of the city as well as life in general. But it would also inspire men to take better care of their bodies.\textsuperscript{118}

Notice how this quote links city living, health, and strength together with the help of boxing. Williams knew from experience that in order to survive and thrive in the city, men needed to be stronger physically, a strength he felt was best achieved through training for boxing. But by 1937, boxing had not taken hold as Williams, Azikiwe, and others hoped, either from lack of demand from fans or lack of quality coaches.\textsuperscript{119}

Azikiwe wrote an article in December 1937 lamenting the lack of coaches and calling for those known for coaching to step up their efforts. To Azikiwe and Reggie Williams, “Boxing is as important as Football, Tennis or Cricket” in terms of promoting health and manhood.\textsuperscript{120}

Since there were few trained boxers in Nigeria, Williams was unable to fully test how good he was as a boxer, so the Lagos Boxing Club decided to reach out to the Gold Coast for an intercolonial tournament. As boxing was not as popular in Nigeria as it was in the Gold Coast see how far Nigerians had come than to fight against its sister colony? Nigerians had for many years complained that the Gold Coast was setting the pace for development between the two colonies: “Why must our sister colony of the Gold Coast always set the fashion for us in everything that is progressive?”\textsuperscript{121} Sport was

\textsuperscript{118} “Boxing in Nigeria” WAP (Lagos, Nigeria), Dec. 17, 1937.

\textsuperscript{119} “Sports Topics: Boxing in Nigeria” WAP (Lagos, Nigeria), Dec. 17, 1937.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{121} “Matters Of The Moment” NDT (Lagos, Nigeria), July 11, 1942.
a convenient test to determine supremacy between the colonies, and boxing
tournaments between the two became tests of strength, manhood, and national pride.

**Intercolonial Boxing with the Gold Coast**

African Intercolonial sports competitions between Nigeria and the Gold Coast had been competed by whites, at least for cricket, since 1928. The majority of matches and competitions taking place were team sports and contested by mainly whites up to the early 1930s. Colonial administrators from each colony would engage in sporting contests, sometimes against their schooldays friends, to determine which colony was “better.” The colonial government would pay for the travel of these athletes, as well as secure their job upon return. For example, Assistant District Officer John Blair asked for 9 days off in 1929 to attend a cricket match in Accra, and it was granted by the government.

Football, another popular Intercolonial match sport, had been part of the competitions since 1935. The importance placed on Intercolonial sport matches increased in the 1930s and took a more important role after the Second World War as the colonies not only competed for sporting glory, but also for independence. The *NDT* noted in 1937 that, in terms of boxing, “What is threatening us mostly now is that we might be taken one day unawares, either by Accra, Takoradi or Ashanti Boxing enthusiasts.” Boxing therefore was a symbol for the strength and vitality of a country, or in this case a colony, when two colonies’ representative boxers were matched against one another. To lose to a smaller colony than Nigeria would be shameful and a stab at Nigerian manhood.

As boxing became more pronounced in Lagos, and stars like Williams wanted to test their boxing skill, a tournament was set against the Gold Coast in March of 1938. The *WAP* frequently reported on the tournament, and remarked that, “This will be the

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122 “Intercolonial Cricket (European)” *NDT* (Lagos, Nigeria) April 9, 1937. The majority of matches and competitions taking place were team sports and contested by mainly whites up to the early 1930s. Colonial administrators from each colony would engage in sporting contests, sometimes against their schooldays friends, to determine which colony was “better.” The colonial government would pay for the travel of these athletes, as well as secure their job upon return. For example, Assistant District Officer John Blair asked for 9 days off in 1929 to attend a cricket match in Accra, and it was granted by the government.


125 Ibid.
first contest of its kind in the history of boxing in the two countries.” The tournament pitted Reggie Williams to fight the Gold Coast’s Daniel Akwei. Akwei was the Gold Coast’s middleweight champion, who beat the famous Gold Coast boxer “Chocolate Kid” in 1937. The WAP noted that “Reggie’s record is well known to local fans who entertain no doubt that he will give a good account of his class anywhere in West Africa.” The tournament also featured undefeated Nigerian heavyweight Bob Savage against Gold Coast’s Seth Odamatten, the unvanquished Gold Coast Heavyweight Champion, who retired late 1938 after an easy victory over “Soldier Moir,” a heavyweight boxer from Liberia. Lagosians heard several reports of the upcoming tournament from the moment the contract was signed:

Mr. Adisa Olatunji Williams, the manager of Bob and Reggie, who returned from Accra last Thursday by the Apapa with the contract, said: ‘The standard of boxing on the Gold coast is very high. It being the National Sport, the people are very keen on it and it is greatly encouraged."

Lagos boxers felt as though the Gold Coast treated boxing as the “National Sport” because of better organization, which included in the 1930s a boxing board of control. The Gold Coast also had the support of the Governor Sir Arnold Hodson, who himself was a boxer of renown, and local Gold Coast chiefs, the “Natural Rulers of the Gold Coast.” In fact, a reception was held for the Inter-Colonial boxers in Accra, with a speech from Sempe Manche, a Ga chief. News of the fight, because it was an important contest between the colonies, elicited interest in boxing. Even the training regimes

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127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
building up to the fight were big news. William’s and Savage’s training sessions at the Hotel Metropole, the new facility in use by the Lagos Boxing Club, “has now become the local point of interest to boxing fans, both black and white, since Bob Savage, the heavyweight, and Reggie ‘Thunderbolt’ Williams, the middleweight started hard training for their forthcoming fights on the Gold Coast.” According to the paper, young boys were especially caught up in the excitement: ‘Young boys are getting very keen about boxing now-a-days’ Reggie told a representative of this paper while he watched him perform some stiff exercises for strengthening the abdominal muscles.”

Williams was pleased. “In fact we have enrolled more new members from the time the news about these fights got about than any other time since the club was started…It’s a good sign…but we still need some more encouragement.”

In the build up to the 1938 Intercolonial boxing tournament at Accra, many of the reports centered on the physicality of boxing, but also the enhanced and desirable physical body of the Nigerian boxer as an ideal body. The muscular toned bodies of Williams and Savage were consistently referred to in reports about the tournament, highlighting how desirable such a physique was for many Lagosians. For instance, one report stated that ‘Bomber’ Bob Savage was “shadow boxing and his big manly frame covered with profuse perspiration gleamed like black marble, in the reflection of the setting sun.” When Reggie Williams spoke, the reported commented on Reggie’s

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130 Ibid.
131 Quoted in Ibid.
132 Ibid.
muscles. "‘It’s a good sign’ [Williams] continued, his head lowered in an attitude that brought his well-developed muscles into play…”  

These boxers were making Nigeria proud, both for representing Nigeria as a colony, and for representing them as ideal muscular men. According to one report in the WAP, “The two boxers have created good impressions from the start, Reggie, by his forceful handshakes and Bob Savage by his awe inspiring appearance.” Notice the allusions to the strength of both, one in a handshake, the other in his physique. Their athletic training was also admired by newspaper reporters and those that watched their training sessions: “To watch Reggie [Williams] with his skipping rope is to realise how he came by his nickname ‘The Thunderbolt.’ His grace, ease, and above all, speed, will put any champion school girl skipper to shame.”

As concerns over the weakness of the black race and lack of national strength grew louder, the ability to take punishment and persevere, even at outstanding odds, was a laudable quality. Bob Savage was known around West Africa for “his terrific punch, and his astonishing capacity to give and take punishment are much spoken of” in boxing circles. To be able to do so at a high level, like Williams and Savage were attempting to do, would bestow national pride on Nigeria. Leading up to the fight, many believed this was the chance for Nigeria to land a significant win against their colonial rival. “Any Nigerian who goes to play on the Gold Coast must remember this salient fact

133 Ibid.
134 “Inter-Colonial Boxers are Given Grand Reception” WAP (Lagos, Nigeria) Mar. 10, 1938.
and that is, that he is fighting for the glory and honour of our dear country Nigeria, and not for himself alone.”\(^{137}\) The downfall of so many sportsmen before when competing against the Gold Coast was that they were selfish in their pursuit, according to the writer. “My advice therefore, let Mr. Savage leave aside all styles and fight in the best way for our dear country.”\(^{138}\) Because national pride was at stake it was necessary for Nigeria to win in order to live up to their ideal. Boxing against the Gold Coast after 1938 retained this appeal to both the manhood of the colony, but also the pride of the nation, as discussed in Chapter 6 and Chapter 8.

But since Nigeria had lost on several occasions in the recent past to the Gold Coast, winning was necessary for pride but also for place within the Empire. “Strange as it may seem, Nigeria is developing an inferiority complex when it comes to Inter-Colonial matches.”\(^{139}\) The sports editor of the \textit{WAP} wanted Nigerians

To realise the destiny of Nigeria in the realm of Sports . . . With a teeming population which hovers around twenty-one million, it is puzzling that Nigeria has not been able to produce a first-rate Inter-Colonial team which should assert Nigeria’s superiority convincingly.\(^{140}\)

Nigeria was the larger colony in terms of geographical size and population, and should by those very facts defeat the Gold Coast handily in every sport. But that was just not

\(^{137}\) “Sports Enthusiast Comments on impending Boxing Contest” \textit{WAP} (Lagos, Nigeria) Mar. 1, 1938.

\(^{138}\) Ibid.

\(^{139}\) “Inter-Colonial Recreation” \textit{WAP} (Lagos, Nigeria) Mar. 5, 1938.

\(^{140}\) Ibid. The reporter mentions the humiliating loss at football 4-0 in 1935 at the Jubilee match at Accra. The year before Nigeria had won but it was not a convincing win and thus hollow. “We are saying that Nigeria should defeat the smaller colonies by bigger scores.” “In cricket we have yet to produce a first class team which should inject fear in the minds of Gold Coast bowlers.” Nigeria lacks “the spirit to win” which the GOLD COAST has in abundance. “Let us therefore wake up to realise our destiny in the annals of sports in West Africa.”
the case in the late 1930s and defeats in football and especially boxing were taken as proof that Nigeria was not as manly, developed, or sophisticated as the Gold Coast.

When they left for the Gold Coast, Azikiwe let the readers know that these men were going to bring glory to Nigeria, especially Reggie Williams, who “seems to be a man of destiny.”\textsuperscript{141} That boxing was in fact something that African and African Americans had been doing, and doing well, was something of a novel idea for many Nigerians, so much so that Azikiwe felt compelled to mention it in 1938. “Do you know, readers, that Negroes have held world championships in boxing for many years?”\textsuperscript{142} Azikiwe went on to discuss famous boxing champions who he hoped would inspire Nigerians towards boxing.

Unfortunately for Nigeria, both Williams and Savage lost their fights in the Gold Coast.\textsuperscript{143} “Both pugilists,” reported the WAP, “displayed excellent performance which was really a joy to watch.”\textsuperscript{144} In the coming weeks, several reports of the tournament were printed, including round by round accounts of the fights. Adisa Williams, no relation to Thunderbolt Williams, also wanted to let the Lagosian public know of the reception and performance of the Nigerian boxers. He wrote that even though the Nigerian boxers did not win, Lagosians need not be sad since they represented the country well. Adisa felt that the whole show was a success and Nigerian boxers did a

\textsuperscript{141} “Inside Stuff by ‘Zik’ – Inter-Colonial Boxing” WAP (Lagos, Nigeria) Mar. 5, 1938.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{143} “Savage is Disqualified in Inter-Col Contest” WAP (Lagos, Nigeria) Mar. 16, 1938 and “Akwei Beats Reggie in Intercol Boxing Bout” WAP (Lagos, Nigeria) Mar. 23, 1938.
\textsuperscript{144} “Akwei Beats Reggie in Intercol Boxing Bout” WAP (Lagos, Nigeria) Mar. 23, 1938.
“good deal by the high quality of the fight they put up” to enhance Nigeria’s reputation. In fact, after Reggie Williams’ defeat, he went to the other corner, shook hands with Akwei “smiling as he muttered congratulations,” showing his sportsmanship. The crowd reportedly cheered him “voraciously,” carried him on their shoulders, and cried “Well done Nigeria” over and over.

After the tournament, there was a surge in the number of boxing shows in 1938 and 1939. For example, the Lagos Boxing Club staged several tournaments at the Glover Memorial Hall, including one in May 1938. What made this event interesting was that the buildup to the event featured a list of notable persons who would be attending, a common advertising practice for social events. This gave boxing legitimacy as a worthwhile entertainment for those in the city to attend and be seen. The contest had in attendance G.C. Whiteley, the acting chief secretary of the government, “supported by prominent Europeans and Africans.” Such tournaments after 1938 were known for their excitement and thrills for spectators: “It will be the first indoor contest staged by the club, all previous ones being ‘al fresco,’ and judging from the elaborate preparations being made, it would appear the Club is determined that the show shall lack none of the thrills and glamour of their previous successful promotions.”

As boxing seemed to be turning a corner in terms of popularity, the Second World War broke out in Europe, drawing Britain and by association its colonies into the

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146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
fray. Leisure pursuits, like sports and especially boxing, were minimized, but not abandoned. The war did bring to the fore several questions about the manhood of the colony, as the draft and the need for soldiers to defend Britain exacerbated concerns of race weakness. Boxing continued during the war, as events were held in support of the war effort and boxing itself was used as a training regime for the soldiers, which further linked boxing to national pride and ideals of healthy masculinity.

**Boxing in Lagos During WWII and its effects on Manliness**

The fact that boxing had been part of the Nigerian colony for more than 10 years at the start of the war and was not, according to the Europeans in the city, attracting more Nigerian patronage, was just as troubling for colonial officials as it was for Williams and Azikiwe. In 1940, the *NDT* ran an editorial lamenting the lack of enthusiasm by Nigerians for the sport and its effects on Nigerian manhood:

> Somehow or other, boxing as a form of sport does not seem to take on very much among the general masses of the sporting public of Nigeria, which is definitely a pity, when it is considered that as a means of developing perfect physical balance and vigour, accurate judgment and
scrupulous fairness in dealing with an opponent, there is nothing to beat it in the world of sports.\textsuperscript{149}

As European notions of sport and its usefulness were met with opposition or indifference from the Nigerians, the fact that boxing was not gaining traction was disturbing. There was no doubt to colonial officials and Europeans in general that boxing was one of the best sports for personal self-improvement, discipline, and physical well-being. It was also a sport that could help in another perceived problem – the loss or degeneration of manhood among Nigerian urban males.\textsuperscript{150}

According to colonial thinking, part of “uplifting” Nigerians was to make “men” out of them. Colonial rhetoric was based on racial ideas that Nigerian and African ‘men’ were more like ‘children’ both mentally and physically, and thus not real men, which separated them from Europeans.\textsuperscript{151} As Carolyn Brown saw with Enugu Colliery workers, they could at once be seen both as a “man” in the village and as a “boy” in the workplace.\textsuperscript{152} For colonial officials brought up in the era of sports, manhood was molded and forged through sporting prowess, as noted in Chapter 2. The war had brought out the need for not only physically fit men, but also those with strength and courage and toughness. Even though Nigerians had not yet taken to boxing, it was becoming more popular.

Those who stake their belief in this noble sport [boxing] and are convinced that the rising manhood of Nigeria has much to gain from it, are not

\textsuperscript{149} “Charity Boxing Tournament” \textit{NDT} (Lagos, Nigeria) Oct. 31, 1940.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{151} See Brown, \textit{“We Were All Slaves.”}

discouraged in their effort to bring its claim forcibly before the sporting public of Nigeria. Several attempts have been made in this direction, and the Nigeria Boxing Club is bravely carrying on the tradition.153

Although new ideas about Nigerian manhood were rising, many believed that boxing should play a major role in supporting this. As sporting prowess, masculinity, and health were becoming intricately linked, and the war raged on, a sport like boxing with its physicality and war-like aggression was considered a remedy for these qualities lacking in the Nigerian population. The *NDT* lamented the lack of healthy men in Nigeria at a recent boxing show, stating “The slogan ‘Mens sana in corpore sano’ has perhaps become somewhat trite, but for all that it is still as true as when it was first uttered, and if any country is badly in need of healthy bodies as well as sound minds, it is a young and growing country such as ours.”154 Here again we see the link between health and citizenship, that the future of the colony required more men the likes of which boxing shaped. The quote also alludes to a growing country, one growing up that needed shaping.

Boxing was supposed to cure one of the most important problems facing Nigeria at the time – a lack of manhood among the rising generation. In an article describing one of the wartime fundraising tournaments, the *NDT* expressed hope that the male community, much in need of the attributes to be gained from boxing, would eventually embrace the sport.”155 The article made it clear that by supporting the sport (and war effort), one was also promoting healthy Nigerian men, who would then become better

154 Ibid.
155 Ibid.
workers and citizens because of their healthy bodies. Support and promotion of boxing was thus linked to the overall development of boys, men, Lagos, and the country as a whole.

Building on this, promoters staged tournaments and promotions in aid of the war, with the proceeds donated to the war effort. There were several “Win the War” type sporting events, with soccer matches as well as boxing tournaments. On October 31st, 1940, the Nigerian Boxing Club staged a ‘Win the War’ boxing tournament to raise funds for the British war effort, thus linking civic and national duty in wartime to boxing. The event featured a “galaxy of stars” fighting, including the well-known Jackie Brown of Ibadan, as well as being patronized by the Governor, Sir Bernard Bourdillon. The inclusion of the Governor as the patron of the event not only made clear the event had the colonial governments’ approval, but also that boxing as sport was given it as well. The promotion was dubbed as a “rare treat” that “No sportsman can afford to miss.” The tournament was a financial success. The audience members were warned beforehand that “Apart from the pleasure that patrons of this show will certainly derive from the thought that they are aiding a worthy cause, they can also rest assured that they are going to see a first class display. Both the officials of the Club and the proprietors of the Royal Hotel have left nothing undone that is possible to them to make

156 “Win the War’ Fund” NDT (Lagos, Nigeria) Oct.19, 1940. There was a ‘Win the War’ fund soccer match between the Olubadan XI (Ibadan) and Lagos Town council, with Azikiwe as a linesmen. The African Pictures Co. sponsored the event and invited both teams to the movie after the match.


158 Ibid.
the show a capital success.”**159** Included in the fight card were “local stalwarts” of Lagos boxing rings, men like Billy Petrolle, Bob Savage, Reggie “Thunderbolt” Williams, and Jackie Brown.**160** With tickets starting at 3/-, the tournament raised £11/8/- after paying expenses.**161** Also, in November 1940, the Marine Boxing Club held a boxing tournament which raised more money than most other charities at the time. In fact, the Marine Boxing Club’s tournament raised £11/4S/2D, which was almost double the £6 that the Army Charity Football match at the Rex Cinema grounds raised.**162**

Despite the Governor’s patronage at boxing events in the early 1940s, boxing as a spectator sport was not catching on with the Lagosian population. That was not blamed on the European population, who had given “fair support” for boxing. Rather it was Nigerian’s lack of desire to support boxing. “It is heartbreaking to notice how few of our leading men give their support and patronage to the sport [of boxing]. It has come to our knowledge that a number of them have been specially appealed to in connection with this forthcoming contest.” The fact that many men, or so the editorial claimed, had been asked to patronize the event and refused, shows the distrust of boxing especially by African leading men. “We hasten to add here that when we remark that sufficient public support has hitherto been denied Boxing as a form of sport in this country, we refer to in particular the African public.”**163** Before the end of WWII, the usefulness of boxing amongst the African population was still in question, with the exception of some

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159 “Charity Boxing Tournament” *NDT* (Lagos, Nigeria) Oct. 31, 1940.

160 Ibid.

161 Ibid.

162 “Nigeria win the War fund Contributions” *NDT* (Lagos, Nigeria) Nov 1, 1940.

163 Ibid.
members of the Nigerian elite. Boxing was not frequented as heavily by mainstream Nigerians as it was by the European population, and seemed to be the purview of the African elite.

One reason for this was the lack of government support. Despite Governors attending boxing matches and tournaments, not one Governor to date had given his patronage to a boxing club.\textsuperscript{164} On November 24, 1944, the Lagos Boxing Club sent a letter to the new Governor of Nigeria, Sir Arthur Richards, seeking his patronage for the club and recounting the good deeds that it had done for the colony.\textsuperscript{165} Richards had promised to support the well-being of the colony and clubs that promoted such an end, and so the Club felt he would be willing. The letter was from Eugene Akerele, the manager of the club and the club’s secretary, Napoleon (Nap) Peregrino. They wrote that:

\begin{quote}
We have been inspired and encouraged by your promise to support any scheme which may be of material benefit to the Nigerian community and we have considered too well the encouragement which your post as Chief Patron of the above named club will give to the sporting enthusiasts and the boxing world of Nigeria. We are also aware of your great interest in sports and we sincerely hope you will encourage this club by accepting the Honourary Post of Chief Patron of the Nigerian Boxing Club. Then we shall be able to compare our status with the Gold Coast Boxing World.\textsuperscript{166}
\end{quote}

The note was passed on to the Sub-Inspector of the police who ran a background check for the Governor to determine the feasibility of becoming the Patron of the club and if that was a worthwhile thing to do. The report noted that “the aim of the club is purely

\textsuperscript{164} Boxing clubs in the United Kingdom had wealthy and elite patrons who supported them and promoted them as well. Having a well-known patron brought legitimacy to the club.

\textsuperscript{165} NAI/CSO 26 26/5 Series 4 - The Nigerian Boxing Club

\textsuperscript{166} NAI/CSO 26 26/5 Series 4 - The Nigerian Boxing Club
recreation and the object is to foster the spirit of sports among its members.” A memo from the Police recorded that they had spoken with local boxing aficionado Douglas J. Collister. Collister told the Police that in Lagos the boxing was not up to par nor suitably organized. He attended some bouts but found them not good. Collister recommended not giving them his patronage because of the current state of affairs. Collister said he was planning on creating a board that would be linked with the National Union Boxing Club in England. The Governor, after reading the report, followed Collister’s suggestion and refrained from giving his support, and that of the colonial government, to boxing.

Not Quite Ready

Collister felt it was not the right time for the Governor’s patronage of the Lagos Boxing Club. Although boxing had made considerable strides throughout the interwar years, it was still lacking the necessary government and public support. The end of WWII would bring about a new sporting atmosphere in Lagos, one in which the currents of opinion and the fledgling structure that began in this interwar period could solidify into the phenomenon of boxing. The work of Azikiwe and Williams did not bear fruit before the war, but afterwards their emphasis on character, health, and sportsmanship through

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167 Ibid. “The Club has as its patrons Mr. Collister, manager of the West African Cold Storage, Lagos and Mr. D. E. Faulkner, the Colony Welfare Officer and it is now being run at the African Sailor’s Inn at no. 42, Bamgbose street Lagos where practices are held every evening.” The police report also noted that DJ Collister was stationed in Port Harcourt and started a local board of control there to put boxing on a sound footing.

168 Douglas J. Collister, affectionately known in Nigeria as “DeeJaySee,” would later become the first chairman of the Nigerian Boxing Board of Control. His influence and importance is discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

169 NAI/CSO26 26/5 Series 4 - The Nigerian Boxing Club. The folio also Mentions that the Railways has its own boxing club and that ZAC has a boxing wing at this time.
boxing took hold. Moreover, ideals of masculinity in Lagos showed a change as conversations over the ideal body and the qualities of the ideal man were reshaped into the ideal of a healthy muscular sporting body
CHAPTER 4
“MUSCULAR CITIZENS”: BOXING WITHIN THE CREATION OF MUSCULAR MASCULINITY IN POSTWAR LAGOS, 1945-1953

A Whole New City

The Second World War ushered in a new era for boxing in Nigeria. Boxing before the war emphasized footwork, skill, stamina, and amateurism, as represented by the person and experiences of Reggie “Thunderbolt” Williams. The decade after the war saw a shift from this “old-school” style of boxing to one in which boxers engaged in a dancing style of fighting, hard punches and knockouts in the ring, show-boating, and the creation of a flashy persona, all of which was connected to a focus on prize money as opposed to mere respect. This shift in boxing mirrors larger changes within Lagosian society, which like the change in boxing, were prompted by the influx of male migrants and the return of soldiers who had participated in a masculine, sporting culture. This segment of the population focused their attention on making money and upward mobility, and they influenced the gendering of public space, which became male-centric, based on physicality and masculine aggression. This new, urban lifestyle encouraged, and was encouraged by, the growing popularity of cowboy movies, sports clubs, bars and nightclubs, edgy music, and a new type of market literature that motivated a can-do attitude. I argue that boxing represents both an important lens through which to examine and an important tool in the linking of masculinity, nationalism, and health, and the emergence of a new urban masculinity that I denominate “Muscular Citizenship.”

Amateur boxing is defined as boxing for boxing’s sake, with no prizes for the victor. Amateur boxing grew out of the amateurism movement of the late nineteenth century Britain. See for example J.A. Mangan, Pleasure, Profit, Proselytism: British Culture and Sport at Home and Abroad, 1700-1914. (London: F. Cass, 1988).
Old School to New School: Boxing from 1945 to 1949

Although historical shifts are never clear-cut and the old-school style of boxing lingered through the 1950s, I argue that this period of time marked a noticeable deviation to a new-school style of boxing. As previously noted, prior to the war, boxers adopted the British stand-up style of boxing, which focused on sound technique, proper footwork, and crisp punches rather than knockdowns. Pre-war boxers were also primarily motivated by the prospects of internal development, character training, and boxing for the sake of the art. Waxing nostalgically after the war, the Sports Editor of the NDT remarked that, “Then [], trainers like Kid Davies and Mr. W.D. Cowan were the pillars of the old edifice. Kid Davies fought in his days in America and England. Mr. Cowan in West Africa ‘smote the fistic air from Nigeria to Dakar.’” These former boxers were worth emulating, the article wrote, for their skill, ability, and character – and their ability to represent Nigeria abroad. Domingo Bailey, the flyweight champion of Nigeria, had learned to fight from Cowan and Davies, and as one article noted, he was part of “the pioneer group who made the old Hotel Metropole (Now Royal Hotel) a storm centre in those good old days…” Due to the lack of payment, promotion, and competition, however, Bailey chose not to fight or defend his title after 1947. Bailey’s retirement marked the end of a boxing era – the end of the old school.

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5 Ibid.
Beginning in 1945, a new school of boxers and boxing emerged who were more interested in fighting rather than boxing. These boxers valued knockout power, fast punching, and dancing rather than sound footwork and crisp punching. Boxing in Lagos after the war, complained several analysts, was nothing more than “street fighting.” The fight was not between “scientific boxers but between two street sluggers,” who cared little for carefully calculated moves and a sound defense and instead carried out a haphazard offensive that was solely intended to achieve victory. Near the end of 1948, the opening of the Colony Boxing Club in Lagos staged a promotion to display its new members. But they were cautious and warned boxing fans of what to expect: “Nobody is promised a high scientific show. In fact, no boxing club locally has ever reached that height. Boxing in Nigeria has yet to be developed but our boys can always give you something to like in their fistic encounter.”

In addition to an unrefined approach to boxing, the new-school boxers also appeared to be more interested in entertaining their audience rather than allowing the audience to merely observe their skill. In 1949, boxer Slugger Chocolate told the NDT that in a recent tournament, “Battling” Boyle (Israel Boyle) lost due to a lack of focus on the fight itself. Boyle had tried to dance and amuse the crowd rather than confront his opponent. Slugger vowed not to make the same mistake in his upcoming fight with

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6 “Royal Hotel Boxing” *NDT* (Lagos, Nigeria), June 30 1947.

7 Ibid. Also on the card Blackie Power knocked out Tiger Bruce. Capt JS Stocker and Mr Chani and Bob Savage were the judges, Dr BJ Ikpeme was the medical officer

Young Panther. Many boxers like “Battling” Boyle used boxing as a way to showcase their individuality and to get the crowd involved. Boxers no longer expected their audience to remain passive. Instead, they understood the experience of boxing as a form of exchange between the boxer on stage and the audience below. Nigerian boxers appeared to be shaping the sport to fit their interests and ideals, moving farther away from the “British” sport it used to be.

This emphasis on “brute force” and “entertainment,” however, was not immediately acceptable to all. For example, in one article, Douglas J. Collister condemned up-and-coming boxers for their dancing and joking around the ring, labeling their conduct unprofessional and unsportsmanlike. A consequence of this development was that many British and elite Nigerians turned away from the sport. However, even as boxing lost some of its original patrons, the new style gained a following from the general male population. As one article asserted, “boxing cannot claim yet a place of importance in the Nigerian social events but the little that boxing enthusiasts have been able to do in organising this popular sport has so enlivened interests and enthusiasm.”

The article continued, “if nothing in the way of scientific display is forthcoming, the spectators can at least expect a rough and savage ring fight.” The unsophisticated nature and the playful charm of boxing after the war resonated with a segment of the population who required a physical outlet and heroes with which they could identify.

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11 Ibid.
WWII Africa and Training Soldiers

The shift from scientific boxing to fighting was partly a consequence of the training that Nigerian soldiers received during the war. British commanders trained their troops using boxing to instill courage, bravery, and character. The introduction of boxing and a sporting culture to Nigerians in the armed forces served to elevate boxing from an outlier to an accepted athletic exercise and sport. When Nigerian soldiers returned home after the war, they brought with them a love for sport, boxing, and more generally, physical displays of manliness. It is within this context that we must place the development of a new style of boxing.

As several scholars have noted, WWII was a watershed moment in colonial history. African colonies were not a far off periphery in the war, but an integral dimension of the global struggle for democracy. African resources continued and nourished the British war effort, while also supplying workers and soldiers that fought in places like the Middle East, Burma, and Europe. By May of 1945, more than 375,000 African soldiers had fought for the British, including over 90,000 from Nigeria. As Judith Byfield notes, “The demands of the war brought unprecedented interventions into the daily lives of Africans by colonial powers and transformed social and economic

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relations within households and communities.” When Singapore fell to the Japanese in 1942, the British turned to Nigeria, and West Africa generally, for labor, food, and resources such as coal, tin, and palm oil, and soldiers for combat. Nigeria also raised a significant amount of money for the war effort. In fact, Gloria Chuku estimates that Nigerians contributed approximately £211,000 to the Nigeria War Relief Fund. Michael Crowder claims that Nigerian contributions for the British War Effort reached £409,255. As such, Nigerians in the armed forces as well as at home played an integral role in the war.

The use of boxing in the armed forces can be traced back to WWI. During WWI, the British used boxing to train soldiers for combat because the sport encouraged fast reflexes, courage, and quick thinking, and because it offered a suitable training technique for the bayonet. As Major Huntington reported after WWI, “the same qualities which go to make a good soldier go to make a good boxer.” Furthermore,

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14 Byfield, Preface, xviii.
15 Ibid, xix. The fall of Singapore meant that the British were deprived of tin, palm oil, and cocoa. Also see Killingray, Fighting for Britain.
19 Huntington, H.F.S., Boxing, The Physical and Ethical Value of (Lecture), Royal United Services Institution, Journal, 65, (1920: Feb./Nov.), 493- 502. Major Huntington spoke of the inclusion of boxing in the armed forces in 1920: “First of all this is obviously courage . . . but so far as boxers are concerned a man requires courage to take a beating and still come up for more. The next thing is self-denial and discipline. In the boxer you want considerable discipline; he has to give up smoking and drinking and live
military commanders also saw that boxing promoted discipline, helped soldiers expel "energies" built up after endless drilling, and encouraged physical fitness.\textsuperscript{20} Armed forces officials also saw sport as a means of social control. Boxing was already popular with West African recruits at the start of the war, especially those from the Gold Coast, but participation by soldiers depended more or less on the willingness of officers to promote it.\textsuperscript{21} Sport became a sanctioned activity within the King's African Rifles (KAR) and Royal West African Fighting Force (RWAFF) in the 1930s, yet no two units were the same in terms of what games they played and what sport was popular with soldiers.\textsuperscript{22} Boxing was a part of the RWAFF and its training before and throughout the war.\textsuperscript{23} This

\begin{quote}
  an abstemious life and do what his trainer tells him . . . the next thing is to keep yourself fit . . . you see practically the same qualities are required in a good boxer as are required in a good soldier."
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{21} Killingray, "Fighting for Britain," 101.

\textsuperscript{22} Parsons, \textit{African}, 123, and Clayton, "Sport and African Soldiers," 118-119. Although sport was important in the lives of Nigerian soldiers during the war, the ability to play sports and professional training were not reasons why Nigerians joined the armed forces, nor was it a tactic of recruitment by the British. Recruitment of Nigerian soldiers came from a number of ethnic groups, but none more heavily recruited than the Hausa did. The recruitment of Hausa soldiers, long thought to be a martial race, was the norm until 1942, when recruitment in Nigeria opened up to others. So pervasive were Hausas in the Nigerian armed forces up to 1942, that Hausa was the lingua franca of the RWAFF, only changing to English during WWII. As Killingray notes in his study of African soldiers in WWII, Nigerian soldiers enlisted in the army for a whole host of reasons. Several examples were found of men joining for jobs, which were scarce during the Great Depression and early war period, or to escape forced labor in tin mines or on farms. However, overwhelmingly Nigerians entered the war for adventure. Colonial propaganda in films and pamphlets appealed to young men to join for adventure, serve the empire, and prove one’s courage and bravery. Bravery was an important theme in discussing the soldier's contribution to the war and an important aspect of their service and definition of their manhood.

\textsuperscript{23} Clayton, "Sport and African Soldiers," 123. Clayton also displays a picture of a session of boxing instruction at the West African Army Physical Training Centre in Ibadan, Nigeria in 1942. Boxing was not introduced in the Kings African Rifles until the 1950s. See Parsons, 124.
multi-functional aspect of boxing motivated commanders of British Armed forces in Africa to adopt boxing as a training tool during World War II. Since boxing was an equal opportunity sport, the reception of boxing among Nigerian soldiers was fairly positive. In her examination of sports in the segregated United States armed forces during World War II, Wanda Wakefield explains that African American soldiers used athletics as a source of confidence, to defy racial stereotypes, contest military inequality, and express their masculinity. Boxing played a similar role among Nigerian soldiers, providing a democratic space within which Nigerians could fight and even defeat white opponents. It thus comes as no surprise that boxing during WWII became a “popular game with strong racial undertones.”

Scholars such as Ahmad Alawad Sikainga have noted that while the political ramifications of World War II have received significant scholarly discussion, the social aspects of the war need more detailed study. We can begin to fill in the details of this aspect by considering the role that boxing played in connecting physical skill and entertainment. In addition to assisting in the training of Nigerian soldiers for combat and providing a democratic space for segregated troops, boxing also served as a form of amusement. The armed forces often put on championship tournaments in Lagos that

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24 See Anthony Clayton, “Sport and African Soldiers,” 116-121


27 Parsons, African Rank-And-File, 124.

attracted many fans. Competitors came from armed forces bases across Nigeria, including Borgu, Kaduna, and Zaria, to name a few. For example, Roy Ankrah, “The Black Flash” joined the RWAFF in 1941.\textsuperscript{29} He had begun to box at the age of 15, and as he wrote in his autobiography, “I was very happy to have had a great opportunity [in the armed forces] to continue to learn boxing from many champions and boxing experts, who realized at once that I showed promise in the ring.”\textsuperscript{30} Nigerian boxer-soldiers like Ankrah were a curiosity due to their speed and stamina, as well as their ability to fight bare-footed, and as a result, they captured the attention of the wider boxing world. One reporter commented, “Ankrah fought at a pace seen seldom in a British ring. The whole time he was showing a boxing spirit typical of the RWAFF. Ankrah's extraordinary speed, energy and toughness are causing quite a lot of people to prophesy very big things for him.”\textsuperscript{31} As Killingray notes, the entertainment that Nigerian boxers offered made the tournaments held by armed forces very popular affairs, and as a result of the high attendance, they raised a lot of money for the war efforts.\textsuperscript{32} More significant for the topic at hand, these tournaments also helped to change popular perceptions of boxing as a useless British sport to one of national importance – winning the war.

When Nigerian soldiers returned home after the war, they continued to box and attend boxing shows and tournaments. Ankrah himself would go on to become the British Empire Featherweight Champion in 1951. World War II thus channeled the

\textsuperscript{29} "Gold Coast's Roy Ankrah to Box in Lagos" \textit{NDT} (Lagos, Nigeria), March 21, 1947.

\textsuperscript{30} Roy Ankrah, \textit{My Life Story}, 2.

\textsuperscript{31} "Gold Coast's Roy Ankrah to Box in Lagos" \textit{NDT} (Lagos, Nigeria), March 21 1947.

\textsuperscript{32} Killingray, \textit{Fighting for Britain}, 242-3.
brutality of combat into the civility of boxing, and the sport of boxing could replicate the aggressiveness and physical aspects of war during times of peace. In addition, the use of boxing as part of the armed forces made boxing more acceptable within Nigerian society, not only as a form of entertainment but also as a model of masculinity. Germany and Japan were depicted as the “enemies” and “aggressors,” who needed to be defeated through strength in order to protect the weak, and soldiers fought for those unable to fight for themselves. Within this context, Bishop S.C. Phillips, a former boxer, argued in 1945 that a real man “is strong enough to defend the weak by tackling the bully and fighting him, in order to rescue the weak from suffering, I expect [he] would be manly and humane enough to do so to the best of his powers.”

Using one’s physical strength to defeat the bully with “a restraining and effective blow,” similar to an evil army, was justified and morally right. As the war came to a close, the valorization of soldiers and the growing approval of soldiers as boxers encouraged others to try their hand at boxing and replicate the matches that had enjoyed so much success among the populous.

Post-War Africa, Nigeria, and Development

The Lagos that Nigerian soldiers returned to was not the same city it had been prior to the war. The colonial government had assumed new orders and new objectives, marking the introduction of an era of development in Nigeria that historians have dubbed the Second Colonial Occupation. British officials sent hundreds of technicians

33. “The Fighting Parson Writes on War” DS (Lagos, Nigeria), September 22, 1945. Emphasis Added. Phillips, who became a Bishop of Lagos, was known locally as the Fighting Parson for both his critiques of social evils and because he was a former boxer. In 1953, he had a change of heart about boxing, and is the subject of Chapter Seven.

34. Ibid.
and experts to Africa in order to make the colonies more efficient and thus more profitable through “development policies.” The goal was to develop the colonies politically, economically, and socially in order to extract as much wealth as possible to rebuild Britain. As Falola argues, the war “paved the way for a new policy on development and welfare” in Nigeria. Due to the significant role that Nigeria had played in the war effort and the suffering its people endured as a result of the war, including inflation, scarcity of goods, and poor living conditions, soldiers and civilians alike expected rewards. The British invested in the improvement of education and nutrition of the workforce, believing that “the greatest permanent asset of a country is the industry, skill, intelligence and enterprise of a healthy people.” In fact, the British government instituted a ten-year plan, developed and passed by the Nigerian Legislative Council and colonial government, that allocated over £7 million for social services like education and teacher training, and for opening more secondary schools, as well as over £10 million for health and medical facilities. As Falola and Heaton argue, this was a marked change in the British government’s involvement in the colony and its development, yet since oversight on the use of funds by the British was lax, most of the money went unused. In general, British efforts to develop existing


36 Falola, Development planning, 22.


39 Most of the money in fact went towards agricultural production at the expense of indigenous industry, which continued to suffer. For more information about the economics of the postwar period, see Ayodeji
infrastructures or establish new ones in Nigeria and to better the circumstances of its people were simply not enough.

Scholars such as Olusanya have demonstrated that Nigerian soldiers came back from the European and Asian theatres of war with a “completely different outlook on life.” They had enjoyed a steady wage in the armed services, and upon their return, they wished to maintain a higher standard of living. Such a goal was not easy to achieve since jobs were scarce in the provinces and the standard of living was lower in the villages. In addition, even though the colonial government enacted legislation in 1945 that demanded that ex-serviceman constitute at least 10% of a company’s employees, such jobs rarely paid more than 1/- per diem. This stood in stark contrast to the 1/9 and 3/9 per diem they earned during the war. Although economic prospects were dismal in any location, few veteran Nigerian soldiers wanted to return to their villages since there was nothing there to attract them. Instead, they stayed in cities like Olukoju, The “Liverpool” of West Africa: The Dynamics and Impact of Maritime Trade in Lagos, 1900-1950 (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004). and Olufemi Ekundare, An Economic History of Nigeria, 1860-1960 (New York: Africana Pub. Co., 1973).

41 Ibid., 238.
42 Ibid., 241. More so than anything else, at least for this chapter, Africans experienced heroism and were capable of acts of heroism, valor, and courage just as much as Europeans. This created what Olusanya called, a “revolution in their attitude.” Olusanya estimated that by 1947, there were roughly 110,000 ex-servicemen in Nigeria, but approximately 73,000 were employed, adding to the discontent with ex-soldiers at their situation and the governments’ commitment to them after their sacrifice.
43 Akin Mabogunje, Urbanization in Nigeria (London: University of London Press, 1969), 261. The Employment of Ex-Servicemen Ordinance, No. 48 required all companies with more than 10 African employees to register with the government, and then absorb ex-servicemen until their workforce was at least 10% African veteran in composition.
44 Falola, Development Planning, 43.
Lagos, for they had gained “new wants, new tastes, and new desires” during their service in the armed forces that a life of farming would not satisfy.\(^{45}\)

Adding to this influx of soldiers, Lagos continued to attract a large number of migrants to the city. Although farming and agricultural work remained a lucrative business in Nigeria after the war, it did not provide enough jobs or wages to those suffering in an economy still feeling the effects of the Great Depression and World War II. As a result, many made their way to Lagos, the economic center of the colony, in the hopes of finding work. Inundated with soldiers and migrants, the population of Lagos grew from 126,000 in 1931 to 230,000 people in 1950, an impressive rate of 3.3% per annum.\(^ {46}\)

The young men who constituted much of the population growth arrived in Lagos with dreams and goals to better their lives, but their numbers made attaining those dreams difficult. As Falola has demonstrated, “the challenges of city life promoted a culture of individualism, as [each] person sought the means to survive and climb up the social ladder.”\(^ {47}\) Within this context, the boxer in Lagos came to symbolize the struggles of those in the city, and the success of the boxer climbing the ladder of local rankings was imitative of those climbing the social ladder. As a result, many young soldiers and migrants came to identify with the boxers they observed. They were attracted to the idea that any man, regardless of social status or birth, had an opportunity to fight and win if he worked hard enough.


\(^{46}\) Mabogunje, *Urbanization in Nigeria*, 257.

Incoming migrants and soldiers were also attracted to boxing due to the changing urban culture. As Falola argues, the cities favored the new class of educated elites because of their access to jobs, money, and influence.\textsuperscript{48} And, although many people struggled to make ends meet, they longed to emulate the lifestyle of the elite. The money that boxers could win in matches offered an opportunity to fulfill this goal. In the late 1940s boxers could expect to earn 5 shillings a round, much higher than unskilled laborers or soldiers could earn in the same time. By 1954, boxers demanded no less than £1 per round.\textsuperscript{49} Hogan ‘Kid’ Bassey remembered that as a professional fighter in the late 1940s and early 1950s, he routinely fought for a lump sum of £2 a fight.\textsuperscript{50} For perspective, the Nigerian median annual income in 1950-51 was £34, a sum that could be earned, if the boxer was good enough, after four fights.\textsuperscript{51} Furthermore, even through 1954, unskilled manual laborers made roughly 4 shillings a day (approximately a pound a week) meaning one 8-round fight at a pound per round was the equivalent of 2 months labor.\textsuperscript{52} Since many boxers in the boom years boxed on average every 2-3 weeks, and sometimes more frequently than that, a boxer was able to make significant

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesize{48} Falola, \textit{Economic reforms}, 14-5.

\footnotesize{49} Horatio Agedah, “Boxing for Big Money,” \textit{NDT} (Lagos, Nigeria), August 15, 1954.

\footnotesize{50} “JM Sanderson Says: Hogan Bassey is Nigeria’s World Title Hope,” \textit{NDT} (Lagos, Nigeria), June 17, 1957. Two pounds converts to roughly 80 USD in 2015. “Pounds Sterling to Dollars: Historical Conversion of Currency,” Eric Nye, Department of English, University of Wyoming, accessed November 11, 2015, \texttt{http://www.uwyo.edu/numimage/currency.htm}

\footnotesize{51} Kilby, \textit{African Enterprise}, 3. According to Kilby, £34 was the average for the Western Region of Nigeria (of which Lagos is located). The Eastern Region’s average was £21 and the Northern Region was £17.

\footnotesize{52} “Five-Shilling Pay Proposal is Rejected,” \textit{NDT}, August 18, 1954. A proposal for a minimum wage of 5 shillings a day for manual labour was rejected in House of Representatives.
\end{footnotesize}
money themselves. The elite vision of leisure included the proliferation of sports clubs and athletic competitions. Boxing thus allowed young men to engage with elite culture, and the values the sport emphasized complimented their own while earning enough money to pay for a better life. Thus, the combination of a growing population of young men and their post-war economic circumstances and social values served to boost the popularity of boxing, enabling it to overcome its initial difficulty in gaining adherents.

**New Optimistic Times and Muscular Citizenship**

The end of WWII ushered in an era of tenacity and individualism in Lagos that at once encouraged an interest in boxing and was encouraged by the values inherent in boxing. Boxing became a part of the gendering of public space in Lagos. In her examination of postwar trade unions and football clubs, Lindsey noted that public spaces in Lagos became more male-centric, since men dominated the public sphere through union participation, social clubs, and sporting clubs/participation. This was not by accident, as Saheed Aderinto contends that the colonial state played a part in gendering the public sphere as male when it separated boys’ and girls’ childhood experiences, education, and sport. Boys were pushed into sports at school, which “emphasized self-assertion, physical play, and prowess.” I add to this argument by

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53 Fighting once a month for a year meant a boxer could receive 96 pounds per year, nearly 3 times the median average income in 1954.


55 Saheed Aderinto, “Colonialism and the Invention of Modern Nigerian Childhood,” in Saheed Aderinto (eds.) Children and Childhood in Colonial Nigerian Histories (New York: Palgrave, 2015), 12. As girls were pushed into domesticity, young boys were groomed for a position in the “male-centered edifice” of colonial society.

56 Ibid., 12.
showing how this new male public sphere was based, in part, on the new physicality and masculine aggression as displayed in boxing, sport, and entertainment like cowboy movies and instilled through school sporting culture. Paralleling and supporting this, after WWII Nigeria experienced a shift similar to what occurred in the United States from a definition of “manliness of honor and duty to a masculinity of physicality and aggression.”

Influenced by these circumstances, sports and the institutions surrounding it provided a channel through which an aggressive, male-centered physical culture could develop, which I call “Muscular Citizenship.”

Muscular Citizenship, the linking of a physically displayed masculinity to membership in the political body, was a response by young men to the new realities of the postwar city and colonialism’s attempts to regulate male migration, behavior, education, and labor in the postwar city. There was also a rise in nationalist feeling, leading to a strong link between the strength of Nigerian men and the perception that they should be able to rule themselves. As Luise White notes, debates about masculinities were a “continent-wide postwar obsession” in Africa. Much of the literature about masculinity in African has focused on the colonial fixation of modern men and marriage as a way to curb the male politicization of migrants. White argues, “The colonial fantasy of what the lonely man might do was equated by the political fantasy of what a wife could do for an African man.”

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58 Lindsay, “Trade Unions and Football Clubs”


60 Ibid.
domestic life for men, according to the colonial thinking, would keep them complacent and away from the pull of political action. 61 Due to the arrival of so many soldiers and migrants searching for work, however, women who might make potential wives were not readily available, and colonial leaders believed that men needed other outlets through which to release pent-up energies. Consequently, much of the energy of the colonial government went to curbing the political culture of migrant men in the cities. 62 Similar to the idea that male sexual energies needed to be replaced in order for men to function normally and productively, unmarried men needed to engage in sports in order to expend excess and deviant sexual “energies.” This focus on the regulation of masculine aggression, in addition to the desire to enjoy elite forms of leisure, the valorization of martial leadership, and the growing number of sports clubs in Lagos and other cities shaped the urban Nigerian male culture.

This idea of masculine aggression is apparent in the emergence of a “can-do” attitude after WWII. Action was the new expectation for male Nigerians, not signing petitions and waiting patiently. This is reflected in the newspaper articles and comments about the policies of the colonial government. For example, H.R. Abdallah wrote a letter to the WAP, entitled “Age of Positive Action,” in which he claimed that, “We have passed the age of petition…. this is the age of action – plain, blunt and positive action.” 63 Abdallah wanted action from the British as well from Nigerians who were unsure of the rising nationalism and calls for independence. Nigerians like Abdallah

61 Lindsay, “Putting the family on track,” 313.
believed that anything was possible in the postwar world for the ambitious, hard-working man. Many young men who eventually chose to box also felt infected with such an optimistic spirit, like future champions Dick Tiger and Hogan Bassey.\footnote{Hogan Bassey, \textit{Bassey on Boxing} (London: T. Nelson, 1963) and Makinde, \textit{Dick Tiger}.}

This perception was supported further by the trend of Onitsha Market literature.\footnote{Emmanuel Obiechina, \textit{An African Popular Literature} (1973). The first chapbook was printed in 1947.} Obiechina argues that this was a uniquely African literature, immensely popular in the postwar cities, written in English, and consumed entirely by Africans.\footnote{Ibid.} With the rapid growth of literacy and availability of printing equipment after the war, mass production of these “chapbooks,” as this literature was commonly known, was for the first time possible and desirable. This literature merged old traditional cultural norms/ideals/ethics with the aggressive, individualistic values of the contemporary urban society.\footnote{Ibid.} As Karin Barber notes, the chapbooks genre revolved around particular themes: “the opposition between rural and urban (with the associated pairs traditional and modern, indigenous and Western); between urban danger and urban pleasure; and around the nature of social mobility, wealth, and misfortune.”\footnote{Karin Barber, “Popular Arts in Africa,” \textit{African Studies Review}, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Sep., 1987), 49.} According to Barber, the Onitsha Market Literature depicted the urban setting as a utopia for young aspirations and upward mobility.\footnote{Ibid., 51.} Young men and women of the postwar city were less convinced that fate existed, and that they were in fact the shapers of their own destiny.\footnote{“I Don’t Believe in Destiny,” \textit{DS} (Lagos, Nigeria), September 8, 1945.} Even more
indicative of the emergence of a forceful masculinity, the authors of this literature chose pseudonyms that emphasized strength and advancement: Speedy Eric, Strong Man of the Pen, Highbred Maxwell, and Money Hard.\textsuperscript{71} These names portray an expertise but also an exaggeration of skills or masculinity in order to convince others to take their advice.

Boxing was part of this shift, and like the Onitsha authors, Nigerian boxers chose extravagant names and titles to promote their style, strength, and personae.\textsuperscript{72} The \textit{NDT} printed an article on how to choose a name for pro boxers, emphasizing, “It is among professional boxers that we come across astonishing pseudonyms such as Sleeping Morris, Tony Baby Day, Hollywood Terror, Super Human Power, Tiger Jack Buffalo. Some even adopt Hollywood film star cowboy names like William Boyd, Billy the Kid, Roy Rogers, Texas Kid.”\textsuperscript{73} Other famous boxers with extravagant ring names included Bad Medicine, 99 Horse Power, Atomic Destroyer, Slugger Chocolate, Johnny Fears No Fall, Dead Rain, Merciless Devil, Stormy Weather, Homicide Black – the list goes on. The importance of these names was twofold; it was a way of celebrating one’s talent, skill, strength, and courage, while also eliciting excitement in fans to see them fight. Linking their ring personae to famous boxers or cowboys who they had seen in movies (discussed below) was part of claiming and displaying their toughness, ruggedness, and manliness in public.

\textsuperscript{71} Obiechina, 13.
\textsuperscript{73} Horatio Agheda, "The Nigerian Boxer and His Name," \textit{NDT} (Lagos, Nigeria), December 27, 1953.
Boxing was part of a larger shift in Lagos and Nigeria in terms of celebrating rugged individualism, which was highlighted by the changing scope of entertainment. One of the biggest impacts on this was the spread and popularity of movies in postwar Lagos, specifically boxing and cowboy movies that explicitly celebrated the individual and his ability to triumph through fighting, tenacity, and violence.

**Post War Entertainment Begins – Movies and Boxing**

The war changed sport and especially boxing into a more acceptable and desirable form of entertainment, and despite (or perhaps because of) its violence, one that was sought after and attended in large numbers after the war. Boxing and other aggressive sports mirrored other forms of entertainment in the city, especially movies, which exploded in popularity.\(^\text{74}\) The most popular films shown in Nigeria through the postwar years were American Westerns or “cowboy” movies.\(^\text{75}\) As Brian Larkin noted, cowboy films in Northern Nigeria like *Ride-Em Cowboy* received “the greatest cheers of all,” and the audiences were loud, clapping, and filled with excitement.\(^\text{76}\) The colonial government recognized this popularity and combined educational films about agriculture, for example, with films about sport and cowboys to attract larger audiences.

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\(^{75}\) James Burns, “John Wayne on the Zambezi: Cinema, Empire, and the American Western in British Central Africa” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, Special Issue: Leisure in African History (2002), 103. “American Westerns (referred to locally as ‘cowboy’ movies) became the most popular films and were so widely shown that, by the end of the Second World War, for many African moviegoers the ‘cowboy’ and the cinema had become synonymous.”

to the former. Larkin also pointed out several examples of colonial reports that children were “too rough” when watching such films. Cowboy films were widely attended by large sections of the population, with no clear class distinction in the movie-goer.

One of the reasons for cowboy films’ popularity was the rugged independence displayed by the cowboys, a “cowboy swagger” and “attitude” that urban youth wanted to imitate, which included fighting, bodybuilding, and martial arts. Cowboy movies gave rise to what Didier Gondola called a postwar urban culture of “performative violence” among young men. Like boxing, cowboy movies provided young men with a certain set of ideals and standards of how to become and act “good at being men . . . on a construction of a new vernacular of violence.” One response to curbing such violence was to get youth off the streets of Lagos and into more constructive leisure pursuits like sport and boxing. Many in Lagos blamed the American Western movies for not presenting a worthy archetypical man to emulate and called for movies with strong, moral male role models who could instill character in youth moviegoers. Jean Jacoby, a lecturer at the Ibadan Grammar School, reported that since so many Nigerians

77 Larkin, Signal and Noise, 87.
78 Ibid., 90.
80 Gondola, Tropical Cowboys, 2-3.
81 Ibid.
attended movies it was important that these films be of educational quality for youths and present lessons that would translate to the postwar world.\footnote{Ambler, “Popular Films and Colonial Audiences”; Jean Jacoby “The Influence of Films on the Youth of Today” \textit{NDT} (Lagos, Nigeria), Feb. 8, 1951. Jacoby remarked in 1951 that 8 out of 10 Nigerians went to the cinema on a weekly basis.}

Even before the popularity of American Western movies, Nigerians in Lagos were exposed to cowboy culture and ideals through the newspapers. In fact, the \textit{WAP} ran a daily cartoon in the late 1930s entitled “Adventuring in Texas,” which depicted heroic cowboys prevailing against villains like “Mexico Joe.”\footnote{\textit{WAP} (Lagos, Nigeria), Dec 1937.} Moreover, during the postwar years, young men usually between the ages of 14 and 25, organized “cowboy” groups, where they learned cowboy songs, dressed as cowboys in uniforms (similar to soldiers), drank palm wine, drilled and marched in parades, and performed at local ceremonies and parties (see figures 3-1 and 3-2).\footnote{P. E. H. Hair , “The Cowboys: A Nigerian Acculturative Institution (Ca. 1950),” \textit{History in Africa}, Vol. 28 (2001), pp. 83-93} As P.E.H. Hair described in 1950, the various Lagosian cowboy groups had been in existence since the 1930s, and their focus was on preparation “for the next war.”\footnote{Ibid, 91.} In other words, learning to be soldiers and to fight. Cowboys would drill like soldiers, whom they also wanted to emulate since, “Soldiering is considered by Nigerian youth an exciting trade.”\footnote{Ibid, 91-2.} Further linking cowboy movies to boxing was the fact that fighting was inherent in the films, something that many men found exciting. Hortense Powdermaker found that men liked the fighting scenes immensely, and several men commented that they learned to box because of
cowboy films in Northern Rhodesia.\textsuperscript{88} Cowboy groups, with their respective “War Captains,” often fought one another using their fists for honor, pride, and respect.\textsuperscript{89} Although dismissed by elders and elites as the misplaced energy of ruffians, the ideals and images of cowboys, soldiering, and boxing became linked in the minds of many Nigerian youth for several reasons. All were foreign imports, all had a degree of physicality and adventure, all had uniforms and most importantly, all praised courage, strength, discipline, health, and honor. For Nigerian youth, the fighting in the cowboy movies and in interclub altercations mirrored the boxers in the ring and those famous boxers they saw in boxing movies and championship replays.

Beyond the American Westerns, another movie genre popular in Nigerian cinemas were boxing films. Between the late 1930s and early 1950s, boxing films were a regular feature in Nigerian cinemas, both fiction and non-fiction.\textsuperscript{90} In fact, boxing championship fight replays, like those featuring the Heavyweight Champion Joe Louis, were a frequent showing and eagerly attended.\textsuperscript{91} Moreover, the British Council sponsored films on amateur boxing training in an effort to promote the values of amateur boxing and health, along with discipline, courage, and character, to young Nigerians. Future World Middleweight Champion Dick Tiger remembered watching

\textsuperscript{88} Powdermaker, \textit{Coppertown}.

\textsuperscript{89} Hair, “The Cowboys,” 91-2.

\textsuperscript{90} For example, boxing films like Golden Boy, Kid Galahad, Gentleman Jim, Here Comes Mr. Jordan, City for Conquest, Body and Soul (all films from the 1930s and early 1940s) were shown in Nigerian cinemas in the postwar years.

\textsuperscript{91} Interview with Abraham Adeyemi Jones, May 2012, Lagos, Nigeria and Olu Moses June 2012, Lagos, Nigeria.
Figure 4-1. “A Day at the Victoria [Bar] Beach,” *NDT*, April 28, 1949. Courtesy of the National Archives of Nigeria.

Figure 4-2. “A Day at the Victoria [Bar] Beach,” *NDT*, April 28, 1949. Courtesy of the National Archives of Nigeria.
Louis’ fights in theatres in Aba, Eastern Nigeria, specifically to watch and learn from his stance, footwork, and his tactics. When asked why and how he started boxing in Nigeria, he told reporters “I started to read about great [boxing] Negroes like [“Homicide”] Henry Armstrong, [World Heavyweight Champion] Joe Louis and [“Sugar”] Ray Robinson…I thought I’d like to try my luck as a fighter.”

This dissemination of black boxing heroes like Louis and the rugged Hollywood cowboy figure would meld together after the war, when news, movies, and even advertisements using boxing began to rise and take shape. So close did they become that boxers, as mentioned above, adopted fighting names like Texas Kid or Small Montana to emulate the fighting cowboy in their boxing. As another example of the ties between the two masculine ideals, Negro Lionheart, the “King of the Cowboys” who tragically passed away in 1952 from a boxing incident, was also a member of a local cowboy group, and the group led his funeral procession through the streets of Lagos.

As the media portrayed both the boxer and cowboy as individuals who were above all rugged, tough, courageous, and willing to fight, Nigerian youth gravitated towards this representation of a man, his actions, behaviors, and self-made tough persona. The attractiveness of this model was compounded by the exigencies of the postwar city, where competition for resources, money, jobs, and women was intense and could lead to violent altercations. As boxing began its merger with the violent urban youth culture, it was aided by the expansion in boxing clubs, tournaments, and company

92 Makinde, Dick Tiger, 11.
93 Ibid.
94 “Late Negro Lionheart Remembered” NDT (Lagos, Nigeria), August 14, 1952.
sports clubs founded by men like Azikiwe (as discussed in Chapter 3) that began to offer boxing to its middle-class employees. Moreover, sport clubs, Boy Scouts, and Boys’ Clubs extended their membership to younger boys and thereby expanded their appeal and simultaneously the reach of the sport.

**Clubs, Companies, and Boxing**

Men migrated to Lagos for jobs not only to pay taxes or fulfill colonial aspirations for employment and labor, but, as other scholars have noted, more importantly for the simple need to secure enough money for marriage.\(^\text{95}\) As marriage and purchasing land were integral steps towards relieving dependence on fathers and kin, and thus being considered an adult, cash from wage labor in cities expedited the process and “abbreviated the period of their juniority.”\(^\text{96}\) As noted previously, the postwar period saw the expansion of employment opportunities in Lagos that attracted many young men to migrate to the city. Once in Lagos, they interacted with a colonial and company system of labor that had changed after WWII. Companies and government saw the social welfare of Nigerians as an important part of maintaining loyalty, discipline, and worker morale.\(^\text{97}\)

The postwar era in Lagos saw the expansion of companies interested in the social aspects of their Nigerian employee’s lives and attending to worker’s welfare. Companies like the Railways and the United Africa Company expanded their sports and

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\(^{96}\) Peel, *Ijeshas and Nigerians*, 118-9.

\(^{97}\) Lindsay, “Putting the Family on Track,” 318.
recreation clubs for employees to enjoy in their leisure time, hiring coaches, building fields, and buying equipment. This was done to teach discipline to workers “for the development of industrial men,” to shape their bodies for work, and as a way to curb politicization of their employees.98 Nigerians enthusiastically engaged in such organizations, and indeed had had a cultural tradition of organized sports before colonialism. As John Blacking notes, sports like wrestling, dancing, gambling, and board games were all popular with Yorubas and Igbos, and inter-village competitions were widespread pastimes.99 Thus, as Lindsey and others argue, sport and athleticism in postwar Nigeria was not unknown or new, but “reflected both official encouragement and local enthusiasm.”100 What changed was the sports played, the league infrastructure available, and, increasingly after WWII, an enlarged audience of sports fans willing to pay for such entertainment.

Regardless of their motives, the move to Lagos and urban life also brought many men, some for the first time, in contact with European sports like boxing. Postwar Lagos had numerous sporting clubs and associations for all ages, like Boys’ Clubs and Scouts for youth (Chapter 5), as well as clubs attached to employment, like Railways Athletic Club, or clubs accepting members whether employed or not. After WWII, these all had boxing as part of their clubs’ activities. What made boxing attractive in the postwar

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98 Ibid., 310. “Reports from the Department of Labor and the Nigerian Railway form this period make clear that sports were encouraged as a part of employee welfare efforts, which it was hoped would help moderate the working class.”


100 Lindsay, “Putting the Family on Track,” 311.
years was the shift towards professional boxing, and with it the ability to earn significant money fighting in the ring.

Although Railways and some other companies had created clubs and sporting teams before the war, it was often because of the demands of African workers themselves for more teams, equipment, and training in the sports. As Lindsey found with Railway workers, the demands came from mainly demobilized soldiers or those who recently graduated from the school seeking to replicate the athletic culture.\textsuperscript{101} Companies saw sports as a constructive way for Nigerian employees to let off steam and divert excess energies. For employees, sport was a way to interact and socialize with peers, network, and most importantly, provided recreation in response to the tediousness of work. In many cases, workers used these clubs to gain access to employment or as avenues to European patronage.\textsuperscript{102} Lindsey found that on many worker’s applications for employment with the railways the applicant listed prowess at boxing or football as “additional qualifications” for the job.\textsuperscript{103} Thus, beyond the civilizing effect and inculcation of ideals and character that sport should provide, Nigerians themselves saw value in sports for their own upward mobility, skill development, personal pride, and even fame. Joining a company sport provided camaraderie, established connections, and provided a space for socialization, but in many cases also gave Nigerians access to sporting equipment, training, coaching, league competitions, and exercise for health.

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\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 313.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 318.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid, 315.
As discussed above, Lindsey has argued that the postwar period saw the gendering of public space in Lagos and other Nigerian cities towards a male public sphere.\textsuperscript{104} Sports were an integral aspect of this process as “athleticism reflected and reinforced the idea that bodily prowess and self-control, teamwork, leadership, and competition were part of the masculine sphere.”\textsuperscript{105} I argue in addition that the male body, specifically the male boxers’ body, was also integral to this change, as the physical gendering of public space was influenced by the notion that an individual male was required to have a strong, muscular body for success in the public spaces of the colonial city, his job, and politics.

Boxing was part of many of these new company sports clubs, and Nigerians opened boxing clubs in response to growing demand. Moreover, older sports clubs like those formed by companies or those formed by the Social Welfare Office (Boys’ Clubs discussed in Chapter 5) also began to offer boxing to its patrons. The \textit{NDT} noticed the growing enthusiasm for boxing: “For the past few years, only the Nigeria Boxing Club was in existence and entertaining the public with boxing contests, but the year 1946 opened with a pleasing array of new comers of outstanding ability from some new boxing teams such as the International’s, U.A.C.’s, Marine’s, Railway’s, Ziks’s, etc.”\textsuperscript{106} In 1946, there were only five amateur boxing clubs, but this number grew to over 30 by 1950. Although no formal organization for competitions existed, inter-company and club tournaments gave employees and club amateurs a chance to test their skill, mettle, and

\textsuperscript{104} See Lindsay, “Trade Unions.”

\textsuperscript{105} Lindsay, “Putting Family on Track,” 323. Also see Lindsay, “Trade Unions.”

\textsuperscript{106} Kid Richards, "Plans & Advancement of the Imperial Boxing Club" \textit{NDT} (Lagos, Nigeria), June 11, 1947. Kid Richards was the Manager of the Imperial Boxing Clubs
courage while promoting the company or club. Although these clubs grew in size, boxing still struggled to gain adherents.

The newspapers in early 1946 commented that the organization of boxing left much to be desired. Lack of organization was one culprit in the lack of boxing popularity. As the *NDT* noted, “As already known, boxing cannot claim yet a place of importance in the Nigerian social events but the little that boxing enthusiasts have been able to do in organising this popular sport has so enlivened interests and enthusiasm.”

Nevertheless, by mid-1947 public interest was starting to change and coverage of boxing was become a more regular feature in the newspapers and radio of Lagos. Despite the increased promotion of boxing in clubs and companies, boxing had trouble in the late 1940s convincing the larger public of the good of the sport. What was missing was a central organization, a boxing board of control, to safeguard boxers’ health, guarantee purse money, and link professional Nigerian boxing to international standards. In the minds of many British and Nigerian elite boxing fans, without a boxing board of control, boxing would never be able to establish a solid fan base or public enthusiasm. The creation of such a board in 1949, discussed below, was the turning point for boxing in terms of legitimacy and paved the way for boxing to represent muscular citizenship in the 1950s.

“*Four Just Men*”: The Calls for a Boxing Board of Control

Boxing was having trouble crossing cultural lines, as pointed out in an editorial in 1947 in the *NDT*. The author noted that “Boxing in Nigeria is not encouraging. The fault lies not with the people who are trying hard to make it interesting but with the public in

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general for not having made a reasonable response to the calls." He went on to discuss that "Before the last World War, there was no interest shown in boxing," but that in the new postwar world boxing was needed to shape youth into men. Maxie Williams surmised that it was contact with a growing number of Europeans during the war that stimulated Nigerian interest in boxing, and "Since then the boys who have responded to the calls are growing in number." Even still, when thinking about why young men decided to forgo a boxing career, Maxie noted that:

The attitude of the public as a whole leaves much to be desired. The body is willing but the soul is weak. I have met many young men who [would] like to become boxers but they dread that they might lose some teeth. . . Others feel that they cannot just allow somebody to kill them. Others again say that they cannot fight without getting money.

The danger inherent in boxing was great, especially since there was no board of control, no medical checks, and improper equipment and rings. Added to that was a lack of financial reward, and money was an important motivation to participation for many Nigerians. Character development and love of the sport, the ideals the British sought to instill, were not enough to attract a large following. Calls were made in the newspapers to have boxing aficionados like Douglas J. Collister, locally known as Deejaysee/DJC, to create a board to fix the problems currently faced by Lagosian boxers, managers, promoters, and fans.

Many British complained that the reason for a lack of Nigerian support for boxing was that boxing shows in the late 1940s were not of good quality and often turned into

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108 Maxie Williams, "Boxing in Nigeria as I see it" NDT (Lagos, Nigeria), Sept 16, 1947.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
wrestling matches in the eyes of some spectators. During an Inter-Provincial Boxing Tournament between Ibadan and Lagos in July 1947, Battling Boyle of Lagos, who was winning the match, was disqualified when he threw his opponent to the ground.\(^\text{111}\) At the same tournament, the \textit{NDT} complained, “Boxing at Ibadan is still at the bottom of the heap. Such fighting names like Bill Killer and Lion Chaser merely exaggerate the boxing quality of those who carried those names.”\(^\text{112}\) Although the names were clever, they did not represent the talent that boxing fans wanted to see, with the exception of Young Panther, “who is the darling of the boxing fans” for his hard punching and quick, dancing style.\(^\text{113}\) Nevertheless, boxing remained outside of many Nigerians’ stance on acceptable European leisure activities because of the dangers associated with the sport, and because the quality of local boxing matches did not meet the standard found in films. This prompted calls for the creation of a board of control to place boxing on a sound footing, and attract government patronage and public interest.

In January 1948, it was reported that “four just men” were meeting to set up an amateur board of control, but it seems this meeting led to the decision to create a professional boxing board first.\(^\text{114}\) The first recorded meeting of the Nigerian Boxing Board of Control (NBBC) was on July 7, 1948 at the office of Harold Cooper of the Public Works Department. The Board of Control, finally inaugurated in 1949,

\(^{111}\) “Inter-Provincial Boxing” \textit{NDT} (Lagos, Nigeria), July 8, 1947.

\(^{112}\) Ibid. Billy Killer was defeated by Teddy Odus and Lion Chaser lost to Red Raymond. Ibadan’s Vici Parry won when Battling Boyle pushed him down and won on a DQ. Jessi Smart outpointed Sucker Lamidi. Jackie Bruce the captain of Ibadan club lost to Young Panther and was cheered loudly. “Young Panther is really a boxer full of promise.”

\(^{113}\) “Inter-Provincial Boxing” \textit{NDT} (Lagos, Nigeria), July 8, 1947.

\(^{114}\) “Boxing” \textit{NDT} (Lagos, Nigeria), Jan. 9, 1948.
ameliorated several problems that plagued boxing. One such problem included having too many self-declared champions and no regulation of the award of that title. Many boxers had claimed to be Nigerian champions in their weight class simply by the fact that they were undefeated in their province or even Lagos. Bombardier Akerele, a former boxer, complained in the NDT in 1948 that even though more Nigerian boxers than ever were proclaimed “champion,” there was nothing legitimate about them until titles were recognized by a Boxing Board of Control. Akerele noted that “It is assumed that all titles with the exception of the flyweight title now held by Domingo Bailey are vacant.”

The NBBC set out to correct other initial problems that plagued boxing in Lagos and Nigeria. As Collister noted, “This state of boxing has soured the local boxing public, and this has been reflected by the very sparse attendance at a number of tournaments.” The problem was both the high cost of tickets as well as the low standard of the boxing. As Collister was aware, “in the past, highly coloured tournaments have been advertised and tickets sold at a fairly high price, but in many cases the tournaments have failed to measure up to a very high standard.” Even though the NBBC stabilized boxing and gave it a legal and legitimate footing in Lagos and Nigeria, it did not have an immediate effect of making the boxing scene in Lagos better. By May of 1950, Collister held a meeting of NBBC because he wanted to make some startling changes “to put Nigeria

115 Ibid.
116 “Boxing” NDT (Lagos, Nigeria), Jan. 9 1948.
118 Ibid
on the fistic map” and raise the standard of boxing. Collister complained that the boxing promotions and the current standards for boxing itself were simply ‘not good enough’ and that is why the gates had sagged at several promotions. People wanted to see action and get their money’s worth. For Collister, “The purpose of tightening up the control of boxing was to encourage the youth of Nigeria, particularly in Lagos, to learn the sport properly from the start, to develop real champions, and to provide the public with the kind of entertainment that would really be worth watching.” One way to do this was to promote champions in each weight class, and to have NBBC-recognized champions.

Collister had wasted no time in setting up the NBBC, however his time in Nigeria was rapidly coming to an end. After over 30 years in Nigeria, primarily in Port Harcourt and only later Lagos, Collister was set to retire in 1951, barely 2 years after the creation of the NBBC. In his honor, the NBBC decided to create an annual championship tournament called the Collister Belt Tournament, similar to the Lonsdale Belt in England, for the “best boxer of the year” in Nigeria. The first annual tournament was held January 1951, when Collister could still be present before he retired back to Liverpool. As a “Ringside Commentator” said in the *NDT*, “Nigerian boxing owes a very great debt to ‘Deejaysee’, and no better title could be given for the award than the

120 Ibid. Another change would be to have 3 minute rounds up to 12 and championship fights going 15 rounds.
‘Collister Belt.’”122 There was also a strong debate over who should win the title of “best boxer in Nigeria” and what standards that boxer should be held to. “Does the Belt go to the man who could hit the hardest and receive punishment the most or to the man who displays, to the admiration of fans and judges alike, the finer points of the leather-pushing game?”123 The belt should not go to the “dancing, prancing action” that wastes energy jumping around the ring as these were not qualities of good boxers. “In fact, it is a saddening sight to watch the antics of the boxer – under the impression that he is giving a thrilling exhibition of footwork, leaps and bounds all over the ring, all his picturesque but unnecessary efforts serving little purpose except to waste his own strength and energy.”124 These descriptions are telling since they not only highlight the tastes and desires of British and elite Nigerians for a type of boxing, but also shows how the Nigerian fighters themselves were internalizing and making boxing their own by incorporating their own styles, dancing, and showmanship.

The debate over style and proper boxing was continually featured in the newspapers. For the British, “It is the interplay of attack and defense, move and countermove, stratagems and wiles to deceive and penetrate the parry and the guard, calling out all the ingenuity of each contestant; the quick and agile mind matching the quick and agile muscle that the joy of a real good bout is found to lie. Not a mere scrap between two sluggers lacking defensive skill that is of no more interest than a dog


123 “Club Leader’s Views on Collister Belt Show” NDT (Lagos, Nigeria), Jan. 18 1951.

124 Ibid.
Yet these scraps between sluggers with their hard punching and brute force were some of the more popular matches for many Nigerians. It was the fast-paced punching and dancing style that attracted a wider Nigerian audience to the sport and it was these aspects, to the dismay of many elites, that they cheered for the most. The average fan wanted knockouts, and newspapers frequently mentioned knockouts, how the knockout happened and even went as far as to say that despite no knockouts, a tournament still provided good boxing. While many elites believed that “The Collister Belt should not go to a ‘slugger,’” the fans showed their displeasure at such a decision and booed when their favorite did not win.

Collister Belt For Sluggers?

The creation of the Collister Belt to select the best professional boxer of the previous year ended the early postwar era of boxing. By 1950, boxing was much different than in 1945 – boxing had the support of the colonial government, had a new Boxing Board of Control, and was a mainstay in the sports clubs and Boys’ Clubs across the city. Boxing was an important part of the spread of spectator sports and leagues in postwar Lagos as it connected the currents discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, like character, health, and citizenship. More importantly, it was integral to the

125 Ibid.

126 “Sensational KO at Boy’s Boxing Tournament” NDT (Lagos, Nigeria), Feb. 6, 1951.

127 “Inter-Provincial Boxing For the Alake” NDT (Lagos, Nigeria), Jan. 8, 1951.

128 “Knock-Out,” “Boxing Prospects for the Collister Belt (3)” NDT (Lagos, Nigeria), Jan. 24, 1951. The writer also mentions that the governor presented the belt, and that Messrs. Lynch, Foreman, Wardill, Farnsworth, and Fatayi Williams were judges, and that Messrs. Hackett, Powderley, Richards, and Azikiwe were referees.
creation of Muscular Citizenship, linking the strength, health, and character of the boxer to the vitality of the nation and the ideal citizen.

As the expatriate British citizens and elite Nigerians tried to shape the types of boxers and styles of boxing that would be acceptable, Nigerian boxers and fans had different ideas. While the Collister Belt “should never go to a slugger,” sluggers remained extremely popular well into the 1950s with the likes of Salau Chiko, Blackie Power, and Dick Tiger. Nigerian boxers melded traditional ideals of creativity, dancing, and “flashy” footwork with modern boxing to create a distinctive Nigerian boxing style, shaping their own ideal of muscular citizenship through boxing.
CHAPTER 5
THE BOXING BACHELOR SUBCULTURE: BACHELORS, JUVENILE DELINQUENCY, DONALD FAULKNER, AND AMATEUR BOXING

Emergence of a Bachelor Subculture

As explained in Chapter 4, Muscular Citizenship, the melding of health, character, sports, and the nation into a new urban definition of manliness, emerged in response to the circumstances of WWII, the return of soldiers, and the rise of sport. In addition to soldiers and educated Nigerians, however, muscular citizenship was also appealing to an emerging bachelor subculture. The intense economic competition, crowded living conditions, poverty, and growing sports culture of the post-WWII colonial city created a bachelor subculture primarily comprised of young, uneducated, unmarried, and unemployed male migrants who valorized aggressive displays of violence, strength showcased through the male body, and contests of skills and sporting prowess. Many of these men drifted towards youth gangs and became, in the eyes of the colonial state, juvenile delinquents. At the same time as this development was taking place and within the societal context that understood sports as the answer to creating good citizens, Donald Faulkner established the Boys’ Club movement in Lagos to combat the problem of juvenile delinquency.¹

Donald E. Faulkner came to Enugu, Eastern Nigeria, in late 1937 as the new Assistant Director of Prisons. Trained as a Social Welfare Officer in Britain, Faulkner was an avid sportsman and boxer who believed in the importance of sport in the development of youth into men. He also took control of the Enugu Reformatory School, a rehabilitation center for juvenile delinquents to learn useful skills and trades. Faulkner instituted a strict regimen of discipline and character building primarily through sport, similar to what he had experienced in his own upbringing and education in England. During the war in 1941, Lagos was in the midst of a perceived increase in crime, prostitution, and juvenile delinquency, and Faulkner was hired to study the causes of this rise in juvenile crime. He found that Lagos contained hundreds of wayward, homeless youth living in the city and joining gangs. His recommendation was to create more leisure activities, spaces, and opportunities for these “troubled” young men and boys to learn the traits of amateur sportsmen to curb their deviant behavior and prepare them for productive and law-abiding lives in the city. Faulkner’s report prompted the colonial office in London to appoint him as the first Social Welfare Officer in the British Empire. Himself a product of the Boys Club movement in Britain, Faulkner copied that model and created Boys’ Clubs all across Lagos, and in each he established boxing as one of the primary sports to teach boys and young men character, discipline, sportsmanship, and courage – tools to survive the urban environment. By 1952, the Boys Club Movement had spread across Nigeria.

2 Although not discussed here, but equally important, Faulkner also found in his study the problems of wayward young girls that drifted towards prostitution. For more information, see Abosede George, Making Modern Girls.
The Boys Clubs used boxing to instill character and a sense of direction within “delinquents” and, these young men in turn absorbed and adapted the sport into their bachelor subculture. In this manner, boxing offered an appropriate avenue by which unestablished youth could express their sense of manliness. The spread of boxing through the Boy’s Clubs and the growing popularity of boxing among boys and young men that made up the bachelor subculture spurred on the creation of the Lagos Amateur Boxing Association (LABA), the precursor to the Nigerian Amateur Boxing Association. With the establishment of amateur boxing as a regulated sport came national championships for young men as another avenue for social connections and local fame. The Boys Club Movement, therefore, created the backbone for amateur boxing in Lagos. This chapter thus detours from the history of professional boxing to show how the concomitant rise of amateur boxing through Donald Faulkner’s implantation of the Boys’ Club Movement not only impacted the development of amateur and professional boxing, but also underpinned the bachelor subculture of boxing and masculinity within Nigeria.

**Masculinity in Nigeria – Emergence of the Bachelor**

Scholars have identified that in precolonial and colonial Yorubaland prior to the 1930s, three broadly defined forms of masculinity overlapped: adult, elder or senior, and the ‘Big Man.’\(^3\) Among the Yoruba, until a man could afford bridewealth and marriage, he was still considered a child dependent on his father and unable to claim adult status. In the early twentieth century, membership in a kin group, the organization of family

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\(^3\) Lisa Lindsay, “Money, Marriage, and Masculinity on the Nigerian Railway” in Lisa Lindsay and Stephen Meischer, *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003), 139.
compounds, and the independence of young men revolved around control of labor. Young men were dependent laborers who would work for their fathers or other kin members in order to secure funds necessary for purchasing land and bridewealth, and elders/fathers could withhold such payment, prolonging young men’s juniority. Until a man was married, he was unable to access land from the family compound nor was in complete control of his labor. As Karin Barber noted, the foundation of a man’s social life was his first marriage. After marriage, a man could set up his own farm, land, and secure dependent labor. He also was the head of the household in relation to his wife (or later wives) and children.

The introduction of colonialism and wage labor had a profound impact on this system as money became the principle form of exchange for bridewealth after WWI. The cost of bridewealth skyrocketed in response to the introduction of cash. As Lindsay noted, in Ondo province in the 1930s, bridewealth costs often exceeded £14, or the equivalent of 16 months’ manual labor. Young men in search of money to finance social obligations or marriage, or to purchase land now migrated in larger numbers to colonial cities like Lagos where they could find jobs and thus lessen their dependence on their fathers. Urban wage labor allowed for young men “to finance initiation rites into manhood, to pay the bride price for marriage, and to acquire cash to pay entrance fees

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5 Lindsay, *Money, Marriage, and Masculinity*, 140.

6 Ibid. 140.
for exclusive and powerful societies.”

The ability of young men to attain cash through contract labor in colonial cities “abbreviate[d] the period of their juniority” and changed the dynamics of the traditional payment system and the role of elders. This was not unique to Yorubas, as wage labor also had a profound impact on colonial Igbo societies towards the southeastern part of Nigeria as young men were no longer dependent on their fathers, seniors, nor 'Big Men' for access to land, women, and resources.

Men in growing numbers migrated to colonial cities for a host of reasons, but one significant motivation was gaining access to wages in order to fulfill social obligations in their quest for manhood, adulthood, and marriage.

The colonial city was a place where African men, young and old, were faced with competing standards of masculine behavior, including the cult of Victorian and Edwardian sportsmanship brought with the colonizers. These new standards impacted how Nigerian elites claimed status and power during the early years of colonialism, which in turn shifted gender roles, generational conflict (elders power over women and young men’s labor), domestic relationships, legal rights and attitudes towards marriage.

As Kristin Mann noted, the economic, social, and political life in Lagos can be perceived at the turn of the twentieth century as Nigerian men and women began to

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7 Brown also notes that these “Big Men” had their own dances, clothing, and titled societies to challenge the traditional village elder system. It was the possibility of regular wage systems of the twentieth century that changed this because access to money meant more junior men could now try to use colonial wage system to attain 'Big Man' status. Brown, “Race,” 40.


10 Ibid.
make choices towards Christian marriages as sign of being ‘modern.’ However, the elite Nigerian men all had access to money, resources, and women, allowing a smoother transition into manhood.

Other scholars have demonstrated that wage labor contributed to the development of other masculinities. Beyond changing the speed of attaining adulthood through traditional markers like marriage, wage labor also adapted conceptions of masculinity towards labor pride. Mann argues that elite masculinity in Nigeria at the turn of the century was determined and contested through access to newly available mediums of colonial commerce, colonial economy, and colonial religion. Mann studied a new type of African, a Christian educated colonial worker (clerks, traders, lawyers, doctors) that drew power not from traditional sources (land, wealth in people, clientage) but from the colonial state (education, job, money). In addition to Mann, Carolyn Brown argued that concepts of masculinity and honor were tied to Nigerian men’s jobs in the Enugu Mines in eastern Nigeria. Skill at one’s job and ability to afford and consume western goods allowed for some men to attain ‘Big Man’ status. Lindsay argues that Nigerian working-class masculinity after the war, as she found with Railways workers, displayed and defended their right to being men through their new

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12 Mann, Marrying Well.

role as “male breadwinners” and providers for their wives and families, something that had been before colonialism (and the war) the purview of women.¹⁴

Several scholars have noted that post war masculinity underwent some significant changes and have shown how dynamic the period actually was for those in Nigeria, especially wage laborers. Through this lens, these scholars primarily examined those that were employed, which was only a small portion of the population. According to Mabogunje, by 1951 over 67% of the population of Lagos was below 25 years of age, many of whom were not engaged in wage labor, were unemployed, or were too young to work.¹⁵ In addition to the other masculinities that scholars have pointed out, the circumstances around WWII created a particular new urban-based masculinity that emerged not through labor but through unemployment, juvenile delinquency, and gangs, as well as the popularity of cowboy movies and sport. This unique subculture of masculinity emphasized aggression, physical strength, skill, and being seen for boys and young men. But officials viewed the men displaying this masculinity, who were generally unemployed and unmarried, as a threat to the state. The rise in crime and gang activity in Lagos prompted the government to hire Donald Faulkner to solve the problem and to channel that masculinity into something more effective for the state. It was through his prescription of sports and boys’ clubs that young men found a vehicle through which to express this masculinity. By looking at Faulkner’s role in the creation of Boys’ Clubs and amateur sport, we see how he implanted a colonial model shaped

¹⁴ Lisa Lindsay, Working with Gender: Wage Labor and Social Change in Southwestern Nigeria. (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003). She also argues that the while men argued for breadwinner wages based on European conceptions of the family, the reality on the ground was in fact much different.

¹⁵ Mabogunje, Urbanization in Nigeria, 250-255.
within the environment of Lagos through which young men could shape their own masculine identity.

Young men had created their own culture of masculinity from their experiences and the circumstances of the city. As Glaser noted about youth gangs and masculinity in South Africa:

In middle-class culture, for instance, professional skills, intellect and earning capacity are emphasised, whereas physical skill and strength tend to be emphasised in working-class culture. Common to all versions of masculinity, however, is male assertiveness and fierce inter-male competitiveness alongside relatively passive, domestically oriented females. Most forms of masculinity also involve a need to control and be 'in control', whether intellectually or physically.  

The proliferation of Boy’s Clubs made sport, and especially boxing, an important vehicle for young men to display their toughness, skill, and manliness. As Anne Mager saw in a similar case in South Africa in the 1950s and 1960s, sports clubs for boys and young men were sites of rivalry and aggressive behaviors developed in part to counteract stifled urban and rural masculinity. Moreover, Mager found that masculinity was constructed around youths’ desires to assert control over male rivals, women, and scarce resources, all aspects of the economic circumstances of post WWII South Africa and colonialism. The Nigerian case was similar to the one studied by Mager. The experiences of war, depression, and intense economic competition in Lagos over resources, women, and money infused sports competitions with important social and psychological meaning in terms of masculinity. Being good at sport was an avenue for

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making social connections, while also letting off aggression through acceptable and sanctioned channels. Deevia Bhana found that South African boys used strength, aggression, endurance, and skill in sport as markers of being “real boys,” especially if the sport in question celebrated violence, strength, toughness, and used a language of dominance.\textsuperscript{18} Boxing was the most visceral display sport in Lagos, with physical violence being a defining feature. The use of boxing as a release of aggression as well as a chance at social mobility no doubt attracted many young Nigerians towards the sport.

\textbf{Bachelor Subculture of Masculinity}

The boxing bachelor subculture of masculinity in Nigeria was but one such subculture existing at the time. Each subculture borrowed from other displays of masculinity and adapted them to meet the needs of the group. Other subcultures present in Lagos included cowboys and gangs like Jaguda and Boma boys.\textsuperscript{19} As Mooney remarks, in this case about white subculture in South Africa, youth subcultures:

- generally comprised a combination of definitive characteristics including: image (a preoccupation with appearance including dress, hairstyle, attitude and language); race (assaulting of members of the African community and the promotion of whiteness); territoriality (the defence of space, excursions into rival groups’ territory, gate crashing and vandalism); individual and group competitiveness (pugnacity, fighting ability, conflicts over girls, and motorbike and car racing); and finally

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sexuality (an emphasis on virility, the objectification of girls and homophobia).20

Subcultures in Nigeria were similar in terms of characteristics, and the bachelor subculture adhered to their own amalgamated ideals dealing with image, territoriality, fighting, and sexuality (not the whiteness or racial tension). But Mooney’s observations are important because they show they ways in which youth were able to assert their masculinity despite their junior status and lack of resources, and how the competitiveness of the city enabled such actions. In Lagos, Nigeria, young men in search of image and fame found role models in boxers. As mentioned in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, boxers were the first Nigerian international sports stars, providing an example of the heights that boxing could allow. Furthermore, the majority of boxers in Lagos up to the 1950s were bachelors. Bachelors were, after WWII, undesirable people in the city because of their frivolous lifestyles, wasting money on consumption of western products rather than investing in land, women, and family support. The position and reputation of bachelors reveals the attitudes and perceptions of marriage and family in Nigeria as a whole, but also the ways unattached men and youths lived, worked, and navigated the colonial urban era.

Migration, Urban Poor, and Juvenile Delinquency

Increasing numbers of Nigerian bachelors in the 1940s and ’50s represented a troubling were on of the symptoms of a rapid growth in urban centers. Unattached young males formed a robust bachelor subculture, whose members were often

considered dangerous and expressing a deviant and defiant lifestyle. Urban bachelorhood represented a break from traditional standards of masculinity: bachelors “refused” to marry, wore brash clothing, and engaged in drinking, leisure, and gang or sport club activity.\textsuperscript{21} Similar to what Gorn found in the United States in the nineteenth century, the bachelor subculture defined masculinity in homosocial interactions in public spaces where they could showcase their “toughness, ferocity, prowess, [and] honor,” attributes which then “became the touchstones of maleness, and boxing along with other sports upheld this alternative definition of manhood.”\textsuperscript{22} Nigeria during the postwar period experienced a similar alternative definition of manhood through sport and boxing. As Lindsey noted, the public sphere in Nigeria became gendered after WWII, as male participation in sport and clubs made male social interactions important to manhood.\textsuperscript{23} Furthermore, displays of toughness, strength, and aggression were some of the ways that bachelors were able to both express and display their masculinity.

The growing bachelor culture was but one outcome of the growth in urban Lagos. Under the umbrella of the bachelor was another equally dangerous young man – the juvenile delinquent. The rapid growth of population in Lagos, as detailed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, brought overcrowding, unemployment, and crime. Although rapidly

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\textsuperscript{21} For example, in 1947, a debate in the \textit{NDT} over the problem of bachelors in the city. Most interesting was a reply by M.A. Sobamowo “Marriage: a Bachelor’s Views” \textit{NDT} (Lagos, Nigeria), Jan. 24, 1947, which was written by a bachelor who was angry that being a bachelor was looked down upon as something bad. He said that choosing to be a bachelor is important and are the lifeblood of a society for eligible women to marry. The colonial government spent considerable effort and time trying to restore control of elders and chiefs over men who had migrated to cities and lamented that they had become “detribalized.” See Illife, \textit{African Poor}.

\textsuperscript{22} Eliot Gorn, \textit{The Manly Art}, 141. Although describing turn of the century America, a similar situation happened in Nigeria.

\textsuperscript{23} See Lindsay, “Trade Unions.”
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growing numbers of poor urban males were a part of Lagos for several decades, the interwar period and especially WWII heightened fears over their presence in the city. More often than not, the bachelor in Lagos was considered to be a juvenile delinquent under the thrall of urban, Western civilization and out of tune with traditional Nigerian practices. As Abigail Wills noted about a similar situation in Britain, the reclamation of juvenile delinquents after WWII was “centrally underpinned by two linked ideologies: those of masculinity and of citizenship.”

The rhetoric of juvenile delinquency was the same in both places, as the manhood of the nation was threatened by young men that were in essence “anti-citizens”: “the aim was quite consciously to transform 'anti-citizens' into citizens, and boys into men.”

In the 1950s, the project of reforming male delinquents centered around the notion of *mens sana in corpore sano* (a healthy mind in a healthy body), which involved ideals such as strength of character, emotional independence, restrained heterosexuality and disciplined work ethic. These ideals were underlain by a holistic understanding of society: the task of reform was conceived in terms of the reclamation of delinquents 'for the nation.'

Nigeria and Lagos especially experienced this wave of reform-minded social workers who adhered to the theory that the health and discipline of the body would repair and reclaim juvenile delinquents, thus relieving a social urban problem. For Nigerians, this process would also make proper citizens, thus linking the ideals of sport and health to those of the citizen, or in other words, producing Muscular Citizens.

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26 Ibid.
Juvenile delinquency, argues Laurent Fourchard, was “invented” by colonial administrators during the Second World War as the problem of vagrant youths and criminal activities came to center stage in Lagos.\textsuperscript{27} Once it became a punishable legal category, with its own administrative and judicial machinery, juvenile delinquency was “henceforth clearly identifiable as a social problem.”\textsuperscript{28} Since the colonial government needed a stable working-class of semi- and unskilled laborers, juvenile delinquents were thus not suitable “men” since they lacked discipline, manners, respect for authority, and morals – and they did not work.\textsuperscript{29} As Illife notes, “Juvenile delinquency was an obsession of the late colonial period… no other Yoruba town was attacked with the energy of Lagos.”\textsuperscript{30} Young men and women moved to Lagos for a number of reasons: to remunerate parents in the village, a lack of food or resources at home, being orphaned, hope of schooling in towns, displacement from family disintegration, or simple dislocation. Despite these varied reasons, the prevailing notion of colonial administrators was that juvenile delinquents were careless, irresponsible, and ‘desperados’.\textsuperscript{31} To colonial officials the main cause of the rise in juvenile delinquency, and rise in deficient men, was the breakdown of the “traditional” home and “inadequate”

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\item \textsuperscript{27} Fourchard, “Lagos.” John Illife agrees, noting that it was the government’s acknowledgement of these crimes and the youth that were blamed for them as the turning point for what made juvenile delinquency a colonial ‘problem.’ Illife, \textit{African Poor}, 187.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Fourchard, “Lagos,” 116.
\item \textsuperscript{29} “Manners Maketh Man.” \textit{NDT} (Lagos, Nigeria), Mar. 24, 1950.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Illife, \textit{The African Poor}, 187. Also see Simon Heap, “Jaguda Boys” and Fourchard, “Lagos.”
\item \textsuperscript{31} Donald Faulkner, \textit{Social Welfare and Juvenile Delinquency in Lagos, Nigeria} (The Howard League for Penal Reform: London, 1952), 1.
\end{itemize}
parenting on the part of Nigerians living in Lagos and other cities. According to Faulkner, the high taxes and a growing population, young men left their villages in rapid numbers for the cities, and Lagos was the prime destination for many youths as the city was the seat of colonial government and the colonial economy. 

**Donald Faulkner – From Prisons to Social Work**

The change in attitude towards preventing rather than reacting to juvenile delinquency in the post-WWII era in Nigeria, and African as a whole, can be traced back to the hiring of the Nigeria’s first Social Welfare Officer in 1942, Donald Faulkner. In fact, Faulkner was the first Social Welfare Officer in the British Empire. As several scholars have noted, Faulkner was instrumental in creating the infrastructure of Social Welfare in Nigeria, which was later copied across British Africa. Faulkner’s approach to solving the problem of juvenile delinquency in Lagos and Nigeria built on his belief that urbanization contributed to the breakdown of Nigerian families, the lack of character development in youth, and on the degeneration of indigenous tradition. 

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32 Ibid.

33 As discussed in Chapter 3 and above, there was not only an increase in the general population of Lagos, but also in its age and gender composition. The majority of migrants who came to the city were under the age of thirty and mostly male migrants, with the under-thirty age group in Lagos consisting of 62% of the population in 1921 and rose to 78% in by 1972. Also, youths under fifteen years old rose from 27% in 1931 to almost 45% in 1963. See Fourchard, “Lagos,” 115-37 and Paul K.N. Ugboajah, “Culture-Conflict and Delinquency: A Case Study of Colonial Lagos” *Eras* 10: Nov 2008, 15. For a detailed look at colonial taxation on men and colonial responses see Moses Ochonu, “African Colonial Economies Land, Labor, and Livelihoods” *History Compass* 11. 2 (2013), 91-103.

34 See Falola and Salm (eds), *African Urban Spaces in Historical Perspective*, 313; and also John Illife, *The African Poor*, 187.

35 See Falola and Salm (eds), *African Urban Spaces in Historical Perspective*, 313


37 Ibid.
importance goes beyond his work as a Social Welfare Officer, as his dedication to the creation of leisure clubs for youths through the Boys’ and Girls’ Club Movement directly influenced the spread of boxing in Nigeria and helped to fashion the boxing bachelor subculture of masculinity.

Faulkner came to Nigeria in 1937, after serving for several years as the Headmaster of Boston House in London, England.\textsuperscript{38} As mentioned at the start of this chapter, on his arrival in Nigeria Faulkner was named Assistant Director of Prisons and was also in charge of the Enugu Reformatory School, positions he held for four years.\textsuperscript{39} He was then asked to study the recent juvenile delinquency phenomenon in Lagos in 1941 with John Savory of the Education Department. They found in their study several “gangs” operating in Lagos, along with “hundreds” of boys living on the streets, “sleeping in gutters, parks, railway yards and mosques.”\textsuperscript{40} Faulkner and Savory interviewed 400 young men and boys that found their way to the Green Triangle Hostel (discussed below) over a two-year period. They wanted to get a better idea of life on the streets, the backgrounds of migrants, and the social conditions that had created a situation where living on the street was not forced but in many cases sought after.\textsuperscript{41}

Faulkner’s study into juvenile delinquency found that:

There was a continuous drift of small boys of tender years on to the streets of Lagos, strangers, often enough, to urban life: that they were able to subsist by petty theft and doing casual labouring work, and that, as

\textsuperscript{38} “Mr. Faulkner Protests: May Take Action” \textit{NDT} (Lagos, Nigeria), July 6, 1949. Faulkner was also a member of the Association of Psychiatric Social Workers and the Probation Officers Association.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{40} Faulkner, \textit{Social Welfare}, 1.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 1-2.
they grew older they gradually sank into the background of criminal life in Lagos.\textsuperscript{42}

Faulkner noted that one out of every three kids in Lagos had a home or parent there, while the rest had been recent migrants to the city. These youths that Faulkner interviewed lived off of petty crime and begging, as well as pimping prostitutes, pick pocketing, gambling, and loafing. Rather than go home or back to their village, many hoped to be incarcerated by the colonial state, as that “offered the best opportunity for poor African boys to acquire the relative security of a western-style childhood and adolescence,” including the education provided in prison that was unattainable in society.\textsuperscript{43} Although not all delinquents wanted to be caught or taught, Faulkner concluded that conditions in the city meant that:

The average boy in Lagos learns to look after himself by hook or by crook at an early age. In order to survive he develops strongly the instinct of self-preservation, few scruples and no principles. Nor it is surprising that in the past the Lagos youth was considered by employers of labour, lazy and undisciplined, with the consequences that imported labour was preferred, causing even more unemployment among the Lagos boys and more overcrowding in the slums of the city.\textsuperscript{44}

“Character” was always an issue as the boys he interviewed showed a lack of strong morals. Faulkner lamented that “those sleeping out [in the streets] appeared to be usually newcomers to the [criminal] life; as they gained experience and deteriorated morally, they made better arrangements for themselves.”\textsuperscript{45} Moral weakness was attributed in Faulkner’s estimation to lack of character development, lack of strong

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{44} Faulkner, \textit{Social Welfare}, 7.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 1.
parenting, lack of education, and urbanization. According to Ugboajah, “considered poverty, the breakdown of the ‘traditional African family’, and urbanization as the main causes of the rise of juvenile destitution and youth offenses.” Faulkner’s solution was to build character and develop strong morals through the discipline found in sports in general and boxing in particular. Only through disciplined training in sport could they reclaim destitute, deviant youth and create useful citizens.

Faulkner also identified the gang culture present in Lagos in his report, and although most colonists saw all members of these gangs as universally worthless, he recognized that indigenous forms of honor had transformed into the urban configuration of youth gangs. As Uganda argues, “The core of gang culture was aggressive masculinity inherited from warrior traditions” and was not only expressed in defiance to authority but also shaped by colonial cinema, prisons, and reformatory experiences. The result was an emphasis on the rough, tough, and rugged, where fighting, stealing,

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47 Ugboajah, “Culture-Conflict”; Illife, Honour, 301.
and a desire to be seen – either in certain forms of dress or seen as a strong physical leader - were aspects of this gang masculinity.\[^49\] This also partly explains the appeal of cowboy movies to youth in urban areas.

Like the gangs that Faulkner saw as “new” in colonial cities in the 1940s, another “new” activity making an impact was the “new game” of Nigerian Cowboys that also emerged during the early 1930s in Lagos, and in the 1940s in places like Enugu.\[^50\] As discussed in Chapter 4, cowboy films were extremely popular in postwar Nigeria because of the rugged independence displayed by the cowboys, a “cowboy swagger” and “attitude” that urban youth wanted to imitate, which included fighting, bodybuilding, and martial arts.\[^51\] As P. Hair observed with Nigerian Cowboys in Enugu, young boys aged 14-25 eagerly became cowboys, and the groups were composed of both “literate and illiterate… Christian and pagan” members. Specific important was placed on uniforms and being dressed as cowboys, and being seen in weekly marches, combating “rival” cowboy groups, and showing their strength and courage in fighting “enemy” groups and protecting their turf.\[^52\] A similar situation occurred in Lagos where Cowboy groups emerged in the Postwar city and, like in Enugu, the groups developed a bad reputation as drunks, “bands of ruffians” and “gangs of thieves” with many not


\[^50\] Hair, “The Cowboys.”


\[^52\] Hair, “The Cowboys.”
differentiating them from gangs, deviant youth, or juvenile delinquents. Enugu, like Lagos, also experienced a postwar boom, population growth, and massive unemployment, giving rise to juvenile delinquents and cowboys. Hair noticed an important aspect of cowboys’ societies, that regardless of status (freeborn, slave or osu) or ethnicity (Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa), young men could gain respect, rise in their group to high positions, and attain a sense of status denied through traditional avenues like birth or wealth.

This helps explain in part boxing’s popularity among youth in gangs and juveniles – boxing provided a literal and physical arena through which these public displays of toughness, strength, fighting, and “being seen” were legally and socially acceptable. Professional boxing stars were shown in the newspapers, and those that participated in amateur tournaments, discussed below, were also mentioned in the newspapers, which meant boxing was a way to gain recognition in the city. Moreover, those that were migrants to Lagos with connection or social status could enter the ring and through their skill and talent open doors denied through traditional means. By the late 1940s, boxers were seen as “well-fed and physical fit, [and] won the applause of the spectators by the way they absorbed punishment.” The praise for toughness, strength, and displays of aggressive violence through boxing became a new avenue for bachelors to claim and display their manhood or masculinity.

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53 Ibid., 86-88. “Certainly the fights between Companies, particularly after festivals when many members are drunk, have led to court cases, and the habit some members have acquired of hanging around public bars in the hope of trading a song for a drink is not very edifying.” Also discussed in interview with Olu Moses, who called juvenile delinquents of his youth ruffians and cowboys. Lagos, June 2013.

54 “Excitement at Inter-District Boxing Show” NDT (Lagos, Nigeria), Feb. 23, 1951.
The Green Triangle and Early Forms of Social Welfare

Despite the colonial government’s desire to eliminate juvenile delinquency during the late 1930s and early 1940s, the initiatives suffered from a lack of money and manpower. Commenting on the problem, *The West African Pilot* (WAP) lamented in July 1941 that hostels or remand houses would need to be built to house the destitute delinquents as the problem was worse than ever before. It was left to the people of Lagos to try to tackle the problem through philanthropy. The solution at first was the Green Triangle, a hostel and boys club in Lagos catering to homeless boys and youths. The Green Triangle was one of the first remand houses of its kind in Africa that housed young boys and girls. Not only did it take them away from the bad influences of the streets, it also taught them useful skills like carpentry or masonry. Although the hostel only lasted four years and closed down from lack of funds and public subscriptions during wartime, it set a precedent for how colonial administrators and social welfare workers would attack the problem of juvenile delinquency. Most importantly, the Green Triangle promoted boxing to discipline and reform juveniles.

What was remarkable about the hostel was that it was African run and created, the first of its kind in West Africa. Opened in 1942, the Hostel was the offshoot of the Green Triangle Club, which was at first a boys’ club established to help destitute boys in Lagos. It was also a place to teach valuable skills to land employment and to survive in the city without turning back to crime. The Green Triangle worked in conjunction with

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55 *WAP* (Lagos, Nigeria), July 10, 1941.
56 *WAP*, (Lagos, Nigeria), July 14, 1942.
57 *WAP*, (Lagos, Nigeria), March 20, 1942.
the police and Boy Scouts to find juvenile delinquents, destitute boys, and troubled youth living on the streets and bring them to the hostel.\textsuperscript{58} Sport was one of the three main activities of the Green Triangle and was important to the mission of the Hostel.\textsuperscript{59} The organizers believed that teaching these boys the fundamentals of several sports, especially boxing (for which they had their own ring), would instill in these youths important life lessons, like teamwork, discipline, and hard work, as well as pride in one’s work and, of course, having fun. Or in the words of the \textit{West African Plot} in 1945, “of raising the moral of the fallen in character.”\textsuperscript{60} The Hostel and its mission equated sport with character formation and discipline as the antidote for the moral and physical impact of juvenile delinquency on youths.

It should then come as no surprise that the first director of the Green Triangle was none other than Donald E. Faulkner.\textsuperscript{61} The Green Triangle boasted that by October of 1942, more than 70 boys had passed through the hostel successfully in the first few months of operation.\textsuperscript{62} The hostel saw some success as several former remand house boxers actually went on to have successful boxing careers. Men like Kinjo Rafiu, who adopted the ring name Rafiu King, became a Nigerian champion, and later went on to

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\textsuperscript{58} Azikiwe, “Green Triangle Club Secretary Broadcasts on Coming Fun Fair” \textit{WAP} (Lagos, Nigeria), Oct. 28, 1942.
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\textsuperscript{59} Ibid. The color green in the name meant “Youthfulness and vigour” while the triangle meant “progress,” and the three points of the triangle represented the three activities promoted – “literary, social and sport.”
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\textsuperscript{60} \textit{WAP}, (Lagos, Nigeria), May 5, 1945.
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\textsuperscript{61} Azikiwe, “Green Triangle Club Secretary Broadcasts on Coming Fun Fair” \textit{WAP} (Lagos, Nigeria), Oct. 28, 1942.
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\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
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have a successful career in Britain. The example of the Green Triangle Hostel and its initial successes had an impact on how Faulkner subsequently approached the problem of juvenile delinquency in the colony with boxing at the forefront.

**Faulkner’s Ideas, Boys’ Clubs, and Boxing**

Once the Social Welfare Department was created in 1941 with Faulkner at the helm, it drew on the model already in place with the Green Triangle Hostel and went about creating Remand Homes, Approved Schools, and during Faulkner’s personal time, Boys’ Clubs. The experience of running the Green Triangle hostel was important for Faulkner. First, it was able to remove the juvenile delinquent from his environment, and thereby gave him a chance to change his habits, if only for the time being. Secondly, the hostel was able to teach valuable skills to young men who had been denied access to higher learning because of either their social status or circumstances like being an orphan or poor. Thirdly, the hostel’s environment and accountability ideals made sure that those who attended were accountable to themselves and each other in the house through various activities and responsibilities – there was a communal garden the teens took care of, as well as sports that cultivated team work, discipline, character, and community building. Lastly, the hostel believed what many believed at the time – juvenile delinquents came from dysfunctional families that did not instill the proper traits in these young men, most importantly respect, hard work, and discipline.

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64 For more information about the hiring of Faulkner, see Fourchard, “Invention.”

Faulkner's dual role of popularizing boxing as well as helping juvenile delinquents was especially marked in his devotion and energy in supporting, funding, and setting up Boys' Clubs across Lagos. So central were the Boys’ Clubs to Faulkner’s plans that within the first few months of him being named Social Welfare Officer, he opened the Kakawa Boys’ Club in which he was the patron, chairman, and boxing instructor in 1942. As future World Champion Hogan Bassey recalled, boxing was a key component of the Boys' Club experience, where he first learned to box, and was very popular with its members.\(^66\) As Bassey remembered, “Like most boys [in Lagos] I eventually joined a Boys’ Club; not with the intention of becoming a fighting man, for I had no inclination in that direction; in fact, I rather disliked boxing and had never even seen a contest.”\(^67\) Like many other boys in Lagos, Bassey had no intention of fighting, but many others more likely had not seen boxing before, or thought it was, like Bassey, “a cruel sport.”\(^68\) For many youths who passed through a Boys’ Club, it was their first exposure to boxing as a sport, and by the early 1950s it was one of the most popular sports for Boys’ Club members.

During his free time, Faulkner created Boys’ Clubs across Lagos and its suburbs based on the Boys Club Movement in Britain.\(^69\) For Faulkner, “Boys’ and girls’ clubs had an objective of providing discipline, regulation, guidance and improvement” in the

\(^66\) Hogan Bassey, *Bassey on Boxing*, 5.

\(^67\) Ibid.

\(^68\) Ibid.

\(^69\) “Boys’ Club Boxing” *Liverpool Echo*, March 7, 1957. By 1957, there were over 2500 Boys’ Clubs across Britain, catering to over 250,000 boys. All of which had boxing rings.
attempt to build “character” in Lagosian youth.\textsuperscript{70} By 1950 alone there were over 25 such clubs in Lagos and its suburbs, with an estimated membership of between 1500 and 2500.\textsuperscript{71} By 1951, the number of Boys’ Clubs had dramatically risen to over 40, with a membership of over 5,000.\textsuperscript{72} These clubs all contained boxing rings and boxing equipment. Faulkner saw in boxing as the one sport that could instill the discipline that he felt those boys needed, mold the character desired by colonial officials in their Nigerian workforce, and also teach them to protect themselves on the streets and in society. Faulkner was instrumental in creating this system of correcting and rehabilitating juvenile delinquents through recreational pursuits like boxing that was copied across British tropical Africa. His recommendations and changes to Nigeria were later copied in Kenya (1944), Gold Coast (1946), and Uganda (1950s).\textsuperscript{73} As Andrew Burton saw in his study of juvenile delinquency in colonial Dar es Salaam, by the mid-1950s the colonial government had set up Boys’ Clubs in towns throughout the colony.

\textsuperscript{70} Ugboajah, “Culture-Conflict,” 20.

\textsuperscript{71} “Youth Meet to Build Character” \textit{NDT} Nov. 1, 1949. Although I was unable to find documentation in the archives regarding total membership numbers, the newspaper frequently mentioned individual club membership numbers. Like the Oyingbo Boys Club which had after 9 months of operation in 1950 over 45 boys. See “The Oyingbo Boys’ Club” \textit{NDT} Jan 27 1950. The membership of these clubs ranged from roughly 40 to 100 members, so it is reasonable to assume that by 1950 there were between 1500 and 2500 members in the 25 clubs.

\textsuperscript{72} “Activities of Boys’ Clubs in Colony Area” \textit{NDT} April 6 1950. According to Mr. P. Graham, the Colony Youth Organiser. Here are 12 clubs on Lagos Island, 6 on the Mainland, 5 at Apapa, 12 in Ikeja and 3 in Epe district. All boys between 12 and 25 could join. The main sports for the all the clubs that are organized into tourneys are boxing, football, table tennis, athletics, wrestling, and swimming. It was noted that Azikiwe and Dr. Adeniyi Jones donated cups for boxing to the Mainland Boys Club and Island Club respectively.

\textsuperscript{73} John Illife, \textit{The African Poor}, 188.

The Boys’ Clubs were set up to build “character,” the antidote to juvenile delinquency, with sports and recreation at the center of this transformation. In addition to concerns over character were local difficulties with health. These clubs promoted health and healthy living as necessary to combat the degenerative nature of the urban environment. By November 1949, youths were meeting regularly at the club located at Ijero on Apapa Road in Ebute Metta. Members, it was noted, had “become conscious of their responsibility as future leaders of new Nigeria.\footnote{As mentioned in Chapter One, Ebute Metta was the first mainland suburb of Lagos island.} With the formation of the Ijero Boys’ Club, they have come together in order to strengthen their \textit{character}, and improve their \textit{health}.\footnote{“Youth Meet to Build Character” \textit{NDT} Nov. 1,1949. Emphasis added.} Describing the double reasons for sports in Boys’ Clubs, Patrick Grayham, the Youth Organizer, “explained the benefits of Boys’ Clubs as a place for youths to meet, discuss, play games, and through association with others improve their \textit{character}.\footnote{Ibid. Emphasis Added.} Grayham continued, “I am glad that youths clamour for more Boys’ Clubs. They are becoming aware of their duties as responsible citizens. With the benefits of Boys’ Clubs, we are building the new Nigeria.” The onus was on local leaders, especially elite Nigerians, to take an active role in promoting and establishing clubs to better the prospects of youth, to develop their character and health, and make them useful citizens of the city.
Faulkner’s work for the “progress” of Africans was especially “commendable.” But his work met with considerable opposition from some areas of Lagos. Faulkner was upset with many Lagosian chiefs because they would not support “proper” amusements or leisure for youths, while also not welcoming the efforts of the newly created Social Welfare Office. Faulkner lamented that there were plenty of employable Nigerians, but a lack of jobs. “The problem of training the youths so that they learn how to play and use their free time wisely is one of great importance.” Moralizing leisure time was the first step to redirecting the Nigerian delinquent “evil behavior” into acceptable channels. “A common and popular solution to this evil [of unstructured leisure] is the formation of Boys’ Clubs.”

**Boys’ Clubs, Boxing Shows and Tournaments**

After the creation of the NBBC and professional boxing in 1949, the distribution of boxing clubs and Boys’ Clubs began to grow rather quickly in Lagos. With the success of Nigerian boxers abroad in Liverpool, the topic of Chapter 6, many guessed at the potential of Nigeria to create world champions. In his New Year’s Message to Lagosians and Nigerians, the Nigerian Boxing Association Chairman, H.G. McFall, was hopeful for the continued expansion of Nigerian boxing. When asked what he expected for 1950, McFall pleaded with Nigerians to open boxing clubs “Throughout the land until every town and village has its [boxing] ring and training facilities. Only in this way will we

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78 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
bring to light the many potential champions there must be among us.” McFall noted that Nigeria should also start to create a national boxing team to compete internationally, starting with matches against the Gold Coast. The first step was to cultivate and attract youths, and Boys’ Clubs satisfied this need because the training given there would allow them to be feeder programs for professional boxing clubs.

Thus, Amateur boxing by 1951 had started to gain the support of elite Nigerians, like Dr. T. Adeniyi-Jones, who not only was the house medical doctor for professional fights, but also donated a challenge cup for Boys’ Club tournaments. Nnamdi Azikiwe, future President of independent Nigeria and avid sportsman (see Chapter 3), donated a boxing Challenge Cup as well, which he called the “Faulkner Cup.” Moreover, several prominent chiefs and Nigerian royalty gave their support to the Boys’ Club Movement. For example, at Agege a group of “Elders of the village made a most welcome presentation of boxing gloves among other equipment.” Meanwhile in Abeokuta, the return of the Alake, Alake Ademola II to the thrown was celebrated with a boxing tournament. The Alake, who was “a sports lover and patron to several clubs” gave his support by organizing and donated £15/5s for a tournament and becoming the patron of

81 “NBA Chairman sends New Year’s Message” NDT Jan. 5, 1950.
82 Ibid.
84 “Activities of Boys’ Clubs in Colony Area” NDT April 6, 1950; and “Helping Young Lagos,” West Africa (London, England) December 22, 1951, 1181. Azikiwe was also connected to the Green Triangle Hostel discussed above.
several of the local Boys’ Clubs. In Lagos, the Oba became a staunch supporter of the Boys’ Clubs and patron to several.

The boxing activities of the various Boys’ Clubs became one of the most popular features of the club and one that attracted considerable newspaper attention with the monthly boxing tournaments between clubs. These events were attended by sizable crowds. Starting in 1948, these tournaments became promoted regularly with the help of Faulkner and D.J. Collister (DJC). One July 1st, 1948, the Yaba Boys’ Club’s boxing team visited the Kakawa Boys’ Club grounds at the King George V Park in Onikan for a tournament. The Master of Ceremonies for the evening was none other than Donald Faulkner, a position that he would hold for many of the boxing tournaments over the following years. Faulkner was commended in the article, which said he “deserves congratulations on his efforts to bring [boxers] to public notice now and again.” Faulkner was praised for his apparent success in creating local boxing clubs and Boys’ Clubs, which not only helped spread boxing in Nigeria but also train these youths for a brighter future by instilling in them the requisite character and discipline. At ringside that night were notable boxing critic Collister, the judge for the tournament, former professional Nigerian boxer Bombardier Abis Akerele as referee, and active


87 “Boxing” NDT July 1, 1948. Faulkner was also personally in charge of the Kakawa Boys’ Club and staged monthly tournaments with other Boys’ Clubs across Lagos.

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.
professional boxer Young Panther as the timekeeper.\textsuperscript{90} A few days later the \textit{Nigerian Daily Times} (NDT) ran photos of the tournament along with a report of the results. News of tournaments like these began in the late 1940s to receive regular coverage in the newspapers in Lagos. These articles tended to be front and center on the sports pages, giving the youth that participated a chance at local glory, especially Moses Ilori of Yaba and Adeoye of Kakawa, whose pictures made the sports page for the above mentioned tournament.\textsuperscript{91} As noted above, visibility or being seen was an important theme in gangs that also transposed itself onto boxing.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\caption{Donald Faulkner refereeing a boxing match between Boys’ Club members. \textit{NDT} February 3, 1951. Courtesy of the National Archives of Nigeria.}
\end{figure}

A month later, the Kakawa Boys’ Club boxing team hosted the United Africa Company (UAC) for another tournament showcasing the good works of the Boys’ Clubs

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{91} \textit{NDT} July 5, 1948.
and boxing. The UAC was one of the largest employers in Lagos and Nigeria and had a long history of promoting sports in the colony. It is interesting to note that those in the Boys’ Club, made up then mostly of unemployed and underprivileged young men, fought against similarly aged employed Nigerians from various companies. Moreover, the event was well attended, having more than 250 spectators, including Lagosian Judge Abbott and Mr. J.P.E.C. Marindin, the principal of the Welfare Training School in Lagos and the Mushin Boys’ Club, and again Faulkner was the Master of Ceremonies, with Collister as the Judge along with Bombardier Abis Akerele and a Mr. O’Dwyer.92 93

One fighter for the UAC that night was Speedy Twitch, who played an important role in the spread of boxing in Lagos in the mid-1950s when he retired and became a boxing coach.94 Twitch was famous locally for his smooth fighting style and speed, and had influenced many Lagosian youths toward boxing.95 The Kakawa Boys’ Club defeated UAC in three of the fight bouts on the card and won the tournament, and to some it demonstrated that the boxing ring was a great equalizer between those in society as young, unemployed, and possibly uneducated young men beat young men who had opportunity, education, and employment.


93 Ibid.

94 Interview with Olu Moses, Lagos, Nigeria, May 2012. Moses was one of Speedy Twitch’s pupils and spoke highly of his coaching abilities. He was sought after to coach leading contenders in the late 1950s.

95 Ibid.
Before the end of August 1948, the Kakawa Boys’ Club fought another tournament against the Mushin Boys’ Club. Faulkner was busy trying to promote as many tournaments as possible, both to bring awareness to his work, but also to attract more boys to the clubs. The tournaments were proof to many that Faulkner’s social welfare agenda was working and that boxing was an acceptable leisure pursuit for the city’s youth. “The Welfare Department needs be congratulated for their good work in finding such sport for these youngsters.” Faulkner and Marindin were to be given “special mention” for their work in “uplifting” these young men. These boxing tournaments were places that local promoters and boxing aficionados congregated, and

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97 Ibid. uplifting being another word for building character, which was often visualized as moving vertically similar to racial supremacy
it was usual that “the spectators included boxing fans like Deejaysee [DJC], and his henchmen Mr. Petrie, and Mr. Nap Peregrino.”98 These three men were instrumental in promoting and legitimizing professional boxing in Nigeria and creating the Nigerian Boxing Board of Control in 1949. As promoters and managers, especially for Peregrino, it was at the local Boys’ Club matches, or other amateur contests, which they hoped to find the next professional champion to add to their own clubs: “It is from the Boys’ Clubs, schools and colleges that the champions of tomorrow come.”99 Many boys knew this, and the Boys’ Clubs provided their chance to get noticed and move upward in Lagosian boxing circles as well as society itself. A chance to work with Peregrino at the Paramount Boxing Club was a chance for some of the best training and promotion in Lagos, and with it a chance to make money and be locally famous.

With these early promotional successes, boxing clubs “sprang up like mushrooms” around Lagos and the colony.100 But these clubs were more than simply boxing training centers, they were a place to make friends and connections. In October 1948, the Isheri Approved School, a remand house set up by Faulkner, hosted the first annual picnic to mark the “Founders Day” of the Youth Boxing Club attached to the school. Local boxing stars Young Panther of Nigerian Boxing Club, Slugger Chocolate of the Railways, Jack Armstrong of Railways, and Jack Giwan of the Colony Boxing Club were in attendance and gave a few exhibitions to excited young boys.101 By 1950,

98 Ibid.

99 “Boxing Show at University College” by KO, NDT June 13, 1950.


annual picnics were a common theme for many Boys’ Clubs as a chance to reconnect with past members and form community bonds. Pictures and descriptions of days at the beach or picnics were common in the newspaper, and many of these picnic and beach days had boxing tournaments or exhibitions as part of the festivities.102 They were also eagerly attended and remembered later in life.103

By 1950, there were several youth and Boys’ Clubs on Lagos Island and the mainland, and this caused an expansion of the number of amateur boxing tournaments that were held around Lagos. Starting in late 1950s, the Onikan Boys’ Club, which housed one of the best boxing rings in the city, was the site of biweekly amateur contests because there were so many boys boxing in the clubs. These contests became part of the increased newspaper coverage on Boys’ Clubs and their work on “character.” The inclusion of local professional boxers in these events was now expected in various roles like referee, judges, or timekeepers. Many of these boxers were asked by Faulkner and Collister to take part and help show some guidance to these youth and young men. Also, many of these boxers had become local heroes to the boys and their presence was encouraging. For example, in a tournament in February 1950, boxer Red Raymond was a judge (along with Faulkner), and Freddie Boon Ilori was the referee (along with Jack Farnsworth).104 It was noted in the newspaper reports that members of

102 “Lafaji Boys Club Picnic at the Beach” NDT Feb. 7, 1950. They had a boxing tournament along with swimming and other games for the boys. 48 boys attended.

103 Interview with Olu Moses, Lagos, Nigeria, June 2013.

104 “Apapa Boys Beat Imperial Club in Boxing Tournament” NDT Feb. 23, 1950. “Nap” Peregrino, the Imperial Boxing Club’s manager and local promoter was the announcer for the evening.
the audience were came from all over Lagos to this show at Apapa.\textsuperscript{105} What is notable is that the winner of the tournament was given a cash prize, something very valuable to Boys’ Club members. Although prizes could range from medals to cash to clothing, these were possessions eagerly sought after and held sentimental value to boxers for years to come.\textsuperscript{106} Moreover, many tournament winners had their pictures printed in the local newspapers, in boxing pose with gloves, trunks, and shirtless, displaying their body and aggression. They became a symbol for many young boys and young men of what boxing could do for one’s prestige, status, and fame in the city. Once amateur boxers started to make the jump to the professional class, and with it professional access to money purses, boxing’s appeal further increased.

**Creating Character? Colonial Boxing and Discipline, ‘Character’**

It was only after the combination of Faulkner’s ideas about “character development” and boxing, in addition to the creation of the NBBC in 1949, that boxing was considered legitimate and worthy for the governments’, and the governors’, patronage. In October 1949, it was announced that the Governor would be in attendance at an upcoming boxing tournament, to which the NDT reported that:

> we regard his Excellency’s interest, not only as an honour, but also an encouragement towards the progress of our sports in general. The country cannot afford to regard Sport as a negligible sideline if we are to develop a true sense of honour to face tests and trials.\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{106} Abraham Adeyemi Jones explained to me how he treasured several of the prizes he won during his career, especially the clothing and medals as forms of accomplishment. Interview with Abraham Adeyemi Jones, Lagos, Nigeria, June 2012.

Having the governor attend the contests, but more importantly give his patronage for boxing, reinforced the discourse of its usefulness for shaping young Nigerians towards “progress” as well as promoting boxing across class.\textsuperscript{108} Before the war, the Governors of Nigeria had refused to patronize boxing clubs, and the newfound acceptance and patronage of boxing by the colonial government was important. By the 1950s there was no denying that the popularity of boxing was rising fast. As mentioned before, the NDT reported that “Sporting clubs are springing up like mushrooms all over the country; only one thing is wanted – unflagging encouragement to harness this newfound energy for our National Progress.”\textsuperscript{109} This newfound energy, or in other words, the energies of the next generation, needed to be harnessed and not lost to “idle” pastimes and delinquent behaviors. The connection is clear – national progress and honor depended on the youth and being able to channel youthful energies into dependable pathways. In order to become proper citizens and useful for the nation, sport was required.

A major problem facing the colonial and Lagos city council was funding the huge demand for sporting and leisure complexes and parks. Much of the initial funding came from public donations as well as the initiative of local businessmen. In February 1950, a Mr. Graham realized that Olowogbowo needed a Boys’ Club, and created one modelled on Kakawa and Yaba Boys’ Club (both started by Faulkner). Graham acknowledged that:

\begin{quote}
The Kakawa and Yaba Boys’ Clubs have been organized as models and they have well served the purpose of bridging the gap between the old village which was the heritage of the past and the modern community.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
Through the Boys’ Club, a return to the old days, where the Village Square afforded the youths a good training ground for life, has been effected.\textsuperscript{110} Again, the idea of progress was at the center of colonial thinking on sport and youth. Fatai Williams, a member of the Olowogbowo Boys’ Club Board of Trustees, went to the United Kingdom in 1950 and saw the good effect that Boys’ Clubs had on British youth, which made him question the current practice of having young men and boys in Nigeria play table tennis, a popular game at that time. Williams found that “I was really disgusted at seeing healthy young boys playing ping pong in every nook and corner of Olowogbowo area, or congregating in side streets in gossip and profit-less pastimes.”\textsuperscript{111} Table Tennis or Ping Pong, like gossiping, was not a worthwhile pastime, at least in the eyes of many colonists. Nor did it teach discipline, the main factor in molding “character.” Sports like boxing, required at each Nigerian Boys’ Club by this time, would do a better job, thought Williams. Moreover, the example of Williams shows how the appreciation of boxing’s usefulness in colonial youths’ development into men became more pronounced.

By March 1950 it was apparent to many Lagosians that the Welfare Services along with the Boys’ Clubs instituted by Faulkner were obtaining some successes in “shaping” the kind of youth and society that people desired. The \textit{NDT}, sensing that self-government, if not full independence, was on the horizon, realized that more services and clubs were needed to obtain that goal. Only when the poor and destitute had been turned into “useful citizens” could self-government become a reality.\textsuperscript{112} In order to

\textsuperscript{110} “Olowogbowo Boys Club” \textit{NDT} Feb. 15, 1950.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.

achieve that, Lagos and colony needed “institutions which deal more practically with moral and cultural training” like Boys’ Clubs and Remand Housing.\textsuperscript{113} The main focus was Nigerians needed training morally and culturally, especially youths who could not control or harness their restless energies: “A great deal of juvenile delinquency is really due to the fact that young people cannot control themselves by any means. If they are made miserable by neglect, sometimes they try to call attention to themselves by shining in evil things. Hence one of the functions of youth groups is to get them engaged in some profitable activities.”\textsuperscript{114} Only through strict discipline and moral guidance, provided by proper citizens, could self-government be achieved.

**The Lagos Amateur Boxing Association**

By mid-1951, amateur boxing had become so popular in Boys’ Clubs and in company sports clubs like UAC, the West African Soap Company, and Costain that many felt it was time to create an organization to regulate and sanction amateur boxing. Many thought that something should be done for the average boxer who will never be a professional boxer but likes to train 2-3 times a week. The *NDT* reported that, “In fact it was after a small show at Costains ring recently that the Lagos Amateur Boxing Association was conceived,” and set up annual championships that took place at Glover Memorial Hall, the site of most major professional fights.\textsuperscript{115} Faulkner’s role in the

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{114} “Children’s Page” *NDT* April 15, 1950.

\textsuperscript{115} “Amateur Boxing Championship for Lagos” *NDT* June 29, 1951. LABA came into being with the following officials acting: J.W. Farnsworth (NBBC), Chairman; E.G. Ellis (WA Soap), Hon. Secretary; A.H. James, Hon. Treasurer; Messrs RA Foreman (Island Boys Club Sports Committee), WW O’Dwyer (Mainland Boys Club Sports Committee), J. Hairison, P. Hickman (Costains), J.D. Horan (Costains), and F.W. Green, Committee.” Also see “Amateur Boxing Championships for Lagos” *DS* July 3, 1951; and “Boys’ Clubs meeting the needs of kids interested in glove was art” *WAP* July 10, 1951.
creation of the LABA was missed at first by the NDT: “One serious omission made in the names of gentlemen recently published supporting the new Association was that of Mr. D.E. Faulkner, OBE. He, of course, has always fostered the amateur spirit of the sport in Lagos and is willing to give all the help he can.” The LABA sponsored/organized tournament was well received by local boxing clubs and Boys’ Clubs, and had over 220 entrants. So many boys entered that the tournament was extended so that it was held daily starting in August, and even so there were between 250 and 500 spectators watching the boys fight every night. As the NDT reported, “Judging from the daily crowds who flock to the Onikan ring, there is no doubt about the general appeal of amateur boxing.” The early rounds of the tournament were free admission, boosting the attendance and providing an opportunity for many who could not afford tickets before to see boxing for the first time. Seeing the popularity that the event was having, the West African Soap Company, the makers of Lifebuoy Soap, donated a trophy cup known for several years as the Lifebuoy Cup to be presented to 116 “Amateur Boxing Championship Rules” NDT July 3, 1951.

117 “Amateur Boxing Championships” NDT Aug. 7, 1951. So far the amateur contest for Oct 12 has 221 entries. Mike Fadipe of Broadway Boxing Club has 50 entries. “Nap” at Paramount has 44. Other clubs that have entered 10 or more are Costains (23), WASCO (15) Ereko Boys High School (12) and Mapara Boys Club (Isher) (10). With so many entries they are having a round robin the week of August 20th to eliminate contestants at the Onikan ring. The second week will take place at the Railway ring and the Costains rings.

118 “Half-way Stage in Amateur Championships” NDT Aug 30, 1951. The articles listed that several clubs had boxers left in the competition. Broadway had 33, Paramount 29, Isheri 9, Costains 11, Yaba 7, WASCO 6, Ijero, Royal and ZAC each 4, Nigerian 3, Oko Awo and Oyingbo each 2, CMS, Gregorian, Ereko, Faji, Eko, Daily Times, Mainland, Baptased and Onikan each 1 left.

119 Ibid.

the winning club who had the most champions.121 “This trophy, incidentally, Will be one of the most valuable in Lagos.”122

When the Amateur Championship tournament was coming to an end, “Knockout,” the NDT boxing correspondent, remarked that:

Organized amateur boxing is a new thing in Nigeria and I am sure our fans must be astonished at the almost incredible developments that have taken place in the last few weeks. And what is more, the standard is high. It is from these young men that the future professional champions of Nigeria will arise…Watch those hard hitting Isheri boys, trained by Donald Faulkner, and Red Raymond, who, you will remember, can hand out a few hard wallops himself. Paramount and Broadway will be there in force too, so look out for fireworks.123

When word reached Collister, the father of professional boxing and first chairman of the NBBC, he wrote an open letter to Nigerians published in the newspapers, remarking that “it is good news to learn of the boom in Lagos Amateur Boxing and the proposed formation of the Nigerian Amateur Boxing Association, and I am quite sure all sporting fans will join me in wishing the founders and officials every success in this worth-while venture.”124 Amateur boxing was important, remarked Collister, because it was the assimilation of sportsmanship, character, and discipline through boxing that “will prove so helpful in moulding them into useful citizens.”125

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122 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
Boys’ Clubs Expand

The success of Boys’ Clubs expanded beyond the borders of Lagos, and by 1951 news of boxing and clubs in other places started appearing in Lagosian newspapers. For example, in April 1951, word had reached Lagos of a recent successful boxing tournament in Aba between the Aba Boys Club and the Enugu Boys’ Club at the Emy Cinema in Aba. In April 1950, Deputy Commissioner of the Colony Major JGC Allen went on a tour of several Boys’ Clubs, including the Oko-Baba club recently opened in Ebute Metta where he saw “good results.” Major Allen was given a

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126 “Boxing at Aba” NDT April 12, 1951. Tourney between Aba Boys Club and the Enugu Boys Club at the Emy Cinema in Aba. Mentions the boys had been training for only a short time but showed promise and ended in a 3-3 tie with 2 draws. Lists all the boys that took part and was “a step forward in bringing boys of various towns together and to foster friendship.”

tour of the facilities and shown where the new clubhouse was to be built in the near future. He was then shown a boxing demonstration by the club’s boxing team, and the event was attended by over 70 club members.128

Thus, by the early to mid-1950s, boxing and Boys’ Clubs had become entrenched in the social fabric of colonial Lagos and even into other Nigerian cities, not only as part of colonial government’s plans for a “disciplined” youth, but also because the youths themselves found values in boxing that conformed to their worldview and conditions they felt in the city. Their reactions to the social and economic conditions in Lagos and to boxing shaped a robust masculine subculture that competed and complimented already present ideals and standards of being and becoming “men.” Over the next decade, this subculture was not only the backbone of boxing, but also affected and shaped Muscular Citizenship for a generation of Nigerian men.

128 Ibid.
CHAPTER 6
“EMPIRE BOXERS ARE THE GOODS”: LIVERPOOL, LAGOS, AND BOXING THE
BRITISH EMPIRE

The Empire Boxes Back

Peter Banasko had his first professional fight at age 17. He was born and grew up in Liverpool, the son of a mixed marriage: his father was from the Gold Coast and his mother from Liverpool. He started amateur boxing in 1929, and after participating in over 100 fights at the amateur level by the time he was 14, he wanted to try his hand at the professional class. He worked with the famous Liverpool promoter Johnny Best and although he prepared for his first fight, he was knocked out in the very first round. But this did not stop him, and he went on to a 40 match winning streak after that potentially disastrous first knockout.1 However, he was barred from competing for a British National Boxing Title due to his color. This made him an outsider. As Banasko noted years later, “I always knew that because I was coloured I could never realize my ambitions [of a British Title].”2 Banasko fought during the era of the infamous “colour bar” which forbade any non-white fighter, regardless of that boxer’s record, from contesting for a national title. After the war, Banasko retired from boxing, but applied for a manager’s license to make a living off boxing.3 He was the first black manager or trainer in Liverpool, and most likely the whole of England. Through his boxing career, he became friends with other Liverpudlian boxing enthusiasts, Douglas J. Collister (see Chapter 4) and Jack

1 The Johnny Best mentioned throughout this chapter was Johnny Best, Senior, the famous Liverpool fight promoter and manager. His son, Johnny, Junior, also a promoter and manager of boxers in the 1950s, will not be discussed in this chapter.


3 Ibid.
Farnsworth (discussed below), both of whom played an integral role in the creation and promotion of boxing in Nigeria. When Collister and Farnsworth saw a boxer with incredible potential in Lagos, like future world champions Hogan "Kid" Bassey or Dick Tiger, they sent them to work with Banasko in Liverpool. Although many boxers left Nigeria, and not all went to Liverpool, it was those that went to Banasko that saw the most success – Hogan Bassey became the first Nigerian to win a British Empire Championship in 1955. By the early 1950s, Banasko was a household name in Lagos, known for being an excellent trainer and manager through the newspaper reports sent by Collister back to Nigeria.

This chapter looks at an important aspect of the popularization of boxing in Lagos and the formation of a Nigerian identity: the visible success of Nigerian boxers in England as both role models and projections of “Nigerian” internationally. As Olukoju argues, Lagos was “the Liverpool of West Africa” because of its importance as a port for the colony and a mecca of trade.4 Many West African companies like the United Africa Company had their headquarters in Liverpool, while many shipping lines like Holt and Co. also were stationed in Liverpool and shipped both people and goods from England to various ports in West Africa. Yet, the connection to Liverpool ran much deeper than trade and economics. This economic link between Liverpool and Lagos facilitated cultural links, specifically the boxing relationship between the two cities. Although employment in Liverpool-based businesses was the primary reason that boxing fanatics like Collister and Farnsworth were in Lagos in the first place, they contributed to

recreating their Liverpool boxing experience as well as they could in Lagos. Liverpool was a boxing hotbed during the interwar and post WWII eras, and men like Collister and Farnsworth’s love for the sport fueled boxing in Lagos. When the British dropped the “colour bar” on British Boxing Titles and loosened travel restrictions on Nigerians and other peoples from the Empire to come to Britain in 1948, an important aspect of the spread of boxing in Nigeria began. For the first time in Nigeria’s history, Nigerians had international sports stars. The success of these boxers internationally created more than a sense of pride, they created the first national icon during the independence era of the 1950s, Hogan ‘Kid’ Bassey (the subject of Chapter 8). However, without the work of Banasko, the conditions of boxing in Liverpool, or the tireless work of D.J. Collister to report boxing news back to Lagos newspapers after his retirement, boxing in Nigeria would have taken a much different path. Banasko became the lynchpin that tied Nigerian boxers in Liverpool to fans in Lagos, and without him the success of Nigerian boxers was not assured. In order to fully understand the spread and success of boxing in Nigeria we must recognize the important parts played by Peter Banasko and D.J. Collister after WWII. By looking at their journey, the role of their sporting labor, and the ways in which they combatted racism physically, we can gain a better understanding of the movement of men and women within the Empire, their experiences abroad, their meaning to those back home, and the position and place of Nigerians within the Black Atlantic.

This chapter will first discuss the economic connection between Lagos and Liverpool that later facilitated the boxing link. It is then followed by an analysis of two important events that took place in June of 1948 that allowed for Nigerian boxers a
chance for success. The first was the passing of the British Nationality Act that loosened travel restrictions for persons born in the Empire. The second major event was a boxing match in which Dick Turpin, a British-born Black, won the British Middleweight Championship and with that victory shattered the British colour bar on boxing titles. These two events not only allowed for Nigerians to travel and fight for Empire Titles, but also opened the door for Banasko’s role as a manager and trainer. The chapter then looks at the impact that Nigerian boxers had on the city of Liverpool and how that success radiated through the newspaper reports of D.J. Collister to Nigerians in Lagos and Nigeria at large. Looking at this aspect of Nigerian boxing history allows one to see its importance to independence, masculinity, and national identity.

“Black Atlantic” as a Physical Space

The relationship of Peter Banasko with Nigerian boxers, and their impact on Nigeria and other colonial peoples’ conceptions of race and ideals of modern manhood highlights an unexplored avenue of Paul Gilroy’s concept of the “Black Atlantic.” Gilroy argued that the conceptions of the “black race” were fluid and in fact quite modern, and that through mediums like music, religion, and print, “Black Atlantic” cultural identities were formed in the international and transatlantic experiences of the diaspora. Gilroy deftly shows how the Black Atlantic was shaped through black responses to racism and through cultural contact and ultimately transcended the modern construct of the ‘nation’, which could not contain the influences and power of those within and around the Diaspora. What Gilroy misses is that there is a physical space within the “Black Atlantic”

that is occupied by black bodies. During the 1950s, the boxing ring was the most visible example of this: it was a contested physical space occupied by Empire boxers from across the Atlantic that converged in Britain. These boxers impacted and were impacted by the racism they encountered. The ring as physical space was another medium for the debate about modern black men by focusing on the black male body and physical dominance. Gilroy has been criticized by others for oversimplifying the African connection and impact on the Black Atlantic. His focus on African American and Black British cultural forms and persons, at the expense of Africans themselves, does not give us a full picture of the impact that Africans had in the creation of and debates about the Black Atlantic. Nor can the cultural impacts of music, literature, and religion fully encapsulate the experiences and processes of creating the Black Atlantic. Through boxing, African boxers, and particularly Nigerian ones, contributed to and challenged this discourse. Empire boxers fought in a distinct, “unscientific” style, different from most white boxers from Britain and the United States. This style was attributed to not only their perceived lack of culture but also their race, and was described in racial terms. Their physicality was on display. Thus, they were highly visible, which “embodied,” quite literally, their cultural expression in a way unique from the other cultural forms discussed by Gilroy.

Boxing, because of its popularity and the visibility of boxers in the ring, cut across class, gender, and racial lines, while linking Africans into the debates within the Black Atlantic. The physicality of boxing, the ring, and the focus/emphasis on the black body

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had a deeper impact on racial discourse and reached more people in the Black Atlantic than the work of black intellectuals, on whom Gilroy focuses. While the majority of Africans did not (or could not) read the works of intellectuals, many in Nigeria and other British colonial peoples across the Black Atlantic did know who the World Boxing Champion was. As explained in Chapter 3, the physical aspect of the Black Atlantic also influenced cultural forms, as influential American boxers like Joe Louis played an integral and influential role in shaping the “ideal man” while imagining the heights to which those within the Black Atlantic could aspire. Moreover, he showed how successful a black person could be in a sport known for physical violence and how one can be viewed as “modern.”

The British Empire Boxing Championships, which stretched across the Black Atlantic, highlighted the unequal relationship between metropole and colonies/dominions, and yet was also a space of equal competition where distinct fighting styles, ideals, and conceptions of race met. After WWII, the racism across the Empire was at times contested literally within the ring, but as the example of Banasko shows, also outside the ropes. Boxing both reinforced colonialism’s racial barriers and served to blur the racial lines. The black immigrant to Britain, whether Nigerian or from another colony, faced many racial stereotypes: he would be perceived as a sexual predator, lazy, averse to hard work, having a violent streak/short temper forged through colonialism and an aggressive attitude, and easily succumbing to primal instincts and desires.7 For example, Joe Wiggal, who wrote under the penname “The Stork,”

commented on a new Empire boxer in 1955 that, "Like most coloured fighters . . . appeared to be a lackadaisical in his work but I knew that he was taking things easily."\(^8\)

Thus, a boxing audience in Liverpool in the 1950s was not surprised to see black bodies in the ring. However, the black boxer was not equal to white boxers: critics maligned black boxers for failing to master the “noble art” and perform the “sweet science” of boxing footwork or sound defensive tactics. Rather, British audiences saw black boxers as punching haphazardly, or in boxing terms, as a “fighter” rather than a “boxer”. It was this superiority of the white in mental capacity and emotional stability that gave them an air of civilized, modern men while relegating Empire boxers to their role as others, less civilized, and in need of mentoring.

Black boxers’ performance in the ring, however, shattered many racial stereotypes and helped turn Empire boxers from a spectacle of curiosity to a spectacle of respect. The relationship between spectator and spectacle is one of power and hierarchy, where those in power perpetuate tropes to justify their position of superiority. For example, a common myth was that black boxers had weak bodies that you could punch – specifically, in the midsection - and easily knock them down.\(^9\) The *Liverpool Echo*’s ‘Ranger’ wrote in early 1951 that, “There used to be a theory that a coloured man could not take it ‘down below’. That has been exploded many times recently…” as many Empire boxers could in fact be hit in the midsection and not crumble.\(^10\) Even as

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\(^8\) Artie Towne was the specific fighter mentioned here, but this was a familiar trope heard around boxing circles. The Stork, “Boxing by Stork,” *Liverpool Echo*, July 9, 1955.


late as 1955 this was still a myth circulating with whites: “These coloured boys are desperately hard to beat. There used to be a saying ‘Hit ‘em down below; they are weak there.’ That has been fully exploded by the many coloured fighters we have in this country at the moment. They are the most conscientious trainers I have ever seen.”

‘The Stork’ repeatedly called Empire boxers ‘the goods’ and would several times in the 1950s comment on how gentlemanly, kind, and trustworthy Nigerians and Empire boxers were in public; “for both inside and outside the ring he is a perfect gentleman.”

These images and descriptions were cabled back to Nigeria, and the success of Nigerian fighters in the ring impacted not only masculinity, but also the shape of nationalism (for further discussion, see Chapter 7 and Chapter 8).

**Liverpool - “The New York of Europe”**

Nigerian boxers found more success in Liverpool than any other city because of Liverpool’s history of trade, West African migration, the importance of boxing to the city, and Peter Banasko. Liverpool, with its position on the mouth of the Mersey River and easy access to the Atlantic Ocean, was a much closer port from the west than the economic hub of London for Manchester, which grew to prominence during the Industrial Revolution. By 1795, Liverpool controlled roughly seventy-five percent of the

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14 For a detailed history of Liverpool, see Mike Fletcher, *The Making of Liverpool* (Barnsley: Wharncliffe, 2004).
British slave trade and almost sixty percent of the European slave trade.\textsuperscript{15} In fact by the end of World War One it was the second largest port in Britain, next to London.\textsuperscript{16} As a port city Liverpool had a more fluid population, reinforced by constant migrations from Irish, Welsh, Scots, and, after WWII, West Indians and West Africans.\textsuperscript{17} As Lynn Schler argues, Africans had been on merchant vessels since the beginning of Atlantic merchant trade as “a cheaper and more efficient alternative to white sailors, who suffered from the tropical climate and its associated diseases.”\textsuperscript{18} WWII exacerbated this seaman shortage, and companies like Elder Dempster, who controlled a large amount of trade, mail, and passenger shipping to West Africa, recruited directly from Nigeria and other ports in West Africa for the first time during the war.\textsuperscript{19} Nigerian and other seamen would stay in Liverpool in between contracts, sometimes for months or years at a time, often working at the docks.\textsuperscript{20} Thus, Liverpool had a “cosmopolitan and transient seafaring population,” consisting of some of the oldest black communities in England.\textsuperscript{21}

The Liverpool of Peter Banasko was both cosmopolitan and racially diverse, and was simultaneously a segregated city with deep racial tensions. When Nigerian boxers

\textsuperscript{15} Michael Parkinson, \textit{Liverpool on the Brink} (Berks: Policy Journals, 1985), 10 and Ray Costello, \textit{Black Liverpool: The Early History of Britain’s Oldest Black Community 1730-1918} (Birkenhead; Birkenhead Press, ltd, 2001), 8.

\textsuperscript{16} Parkinson, \textit{Liverpool}, 10.

\textsuperscript{17} Diane Frost, “Ambiguous Identities: Constructing and de-constructing black and white ‘Scouse’ identities in twentieth century Liverpool” in Neville Kirk, ed. \textit{Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of ‘North’ and ‘Northernness’} (Ashgate: Burlington, 2000), 197. Liverpool was such an important hub for immigration that the first international airport built in England was in Liverpool.


\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 35.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 43-4.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid. Liverpool also had the oldest Chinese population in England.
began traveling to Liverpool in the late 1940s, the city’s population was well over
700,000 people, and a sizable percentage of that was black residents.\textsuperscript{22} Even then,
black boxers were excluded, segregated, and discriminated against, as described
below. Because of the continued trade between Liverpool and West Africa, West African
men became fixtures in Liverpool; many settled in the city and married local women, like
Peter Banasko’s father.\textsuperscript{23} Kofi Banasko was a fireman on the ship “\textit{Warri}” that made
trips between Liverpool and West Africa.\textsuperscript{24} As Schler has found, part of the appeal for
becoming a seaman was the allure of travel and exploration, and with it came
friendships and social bonds across the Atlantic. But African seamen were often met
with apprehension and racial prejudice, because the white elite of Liverpool feared
mixed race children. This social anxiety is apparent in Muriel Fletcher’s 1930 study on
mixed race children.\textsuperscript{25} Her findings reported that mixing of races, which was forbidden
in the colonies, led to fatherless children raised in immorality in Liverpool as black men

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Liverpool Archives} – 1951 British Census.

\textsuperscript{23} Email correspondence with Peter Banasko, Junior, March 13, 2015. “The Passport details. Issued at Sekondi, 23/11/1926 no 5923. Approved by Frederick Gordon Guggisberg, Brigadier General. Height 5ft 11 inches. DOB - Cape Coast 14/10/1888-again I have come across different DOBs - 1885/89/90! Identify/Service certificate gives date of birth as 1st of January 1886 and place of birth King Edward Town BWA. Kofi was his nick name. Allegedly educated at a Roman Catholic School - within his personal papers was an English Fanti Catechism of Christian Doctrine but in the name of Master James Moses Hagan, Roman Catholic School, Cape Coast 20/01/09. Reportedly had a sister called Marcella or Marcia who visited granddad on her way to America in the 1940s. Different spellings for our surname - Banasko (the spelling used by my family), Barnasco, Bernesco etc. Probably phonetic. Married my grandmother 24/04/1915, the rank/profession of his father was given as 'Gentleman', he was deceased and his name was Peter Banasko. Earliest date on his Certificate of Discharge 24/05/1911 Liverpool - was a fireman on the ship Warri - Liverpool to W.C.Africa. Resided in Liverpool but unsure what date he came to the UK.” For more information about 18\textsuperscript{th} and nineteenth century Liverpool and its reliance on and connection to West African seamen, see Diane Frost, \textit{Work and Community Among West African Migrant Workers}, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998).

\textsuperscript{24} Email correspondence with Peter Banasko, Junior, March 13, 2015.

could not control their sexual mores, were constantly traveling, and were a threat to white women and thus the city. Yet, since the need for cheap labor continued, African men continued to be recruited to work for Liverpudlian companies and as such, African men and Nigerians in particular became a more noticeable fixture in Liverpool. Kofi Banasko settled in Liverpool, and his son Peter had an indelible impact on Nigerian boxing.

Boxing was a favorite sport of Liverpudlians during the interwar years, especially for dock workers, seamen, other working-class men, and school boys. At the same time, and similar to what happened in Nigeria after the Second World War, the 1930s in Liverpool saw the proliferation of Boys’ Clubs, replete with boxing rings and trained coaches, which were created to teach young and at-risk youth valuable skills like courage, character, discipline, and sportsmanship. In fact, there were close to 2500 Boys’ Clubs in Britain by 1957 with an estimated enrollment of 250,000 boys – the success of which was copied to Nigeria, as noted in Chapter 5. Peter Banasko was born into this environment in Liverpool in 1915, and like many young boys in the city, he took to boxing. He started the sport in 1929 at the famous St. Malachy’s Gym on Robertson Street in Dingle. For many boys growing up in Liverpool, boxing was a rite of passage during the interwar years, and schoolboy boxing championships were hotly

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26 Lynn Schler, 62-3.
28 St. Malachy’s was also a primary school that opened in 1910 and featured a boxing club as one of several activities to teach discipline, respect, and courage to young boys. It was closed in 2010. Ben Turner, “Toxteth’s St Malachy’s school closes after almost 100 years,” *Liverpool Echo*, July 21, 2010.
contested and desired. At the age of fourteen he had amassed 100 amateur fights and became a schoolboy champion, even meeting the Prince of Wales, who gave him a gold watch. Banasko recalled that this watch and several other medals he had won through boxing had been stolen over the years, highlighting the rough character of Liverpool as a dangerous city where one needed to learn how to protect oneself. At 17, he turned professional under the promoter Johnny Best, who founded the Liverpool Stadium. Nevertheless, Banasko's first fight ended in disaster: he was knocked out in the first round by Chris Butler. He didn't give up after such a setback, however, and went on to win 40 contests in a row. As previously mentioned, even with his skill and winning streak, Banasko said "[I] always knew that as I was coloured I would never realize my ambitions." Despite the racism of the time, Banasko made a name for himself as a boxer, and his reputation along with his connection to Johnny Best came in handy when he himself became a manager.

Johnny Best Senior, a former Army Middleweight champion boxer and avid boxing fan, built the first boxing-dedicated stadium in England, “Liverpool Stadium,” in 1932, and promoted weekly fights featuring local talent. “The Stadium,” as it was

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29 Interview with Terry Carson, June 2014, Liverpool, England.

30 Jenkinson and Shaw, The Mersey Fighters, 11. Banasko was part of the charity show at Lambeth Baths, run by the Metropolitan Police.

31 Ibid.

32 Liverpool Stadium: Cuttings and Views, 1932-1957, Liverpool Archives: HQ796.83 STA –. The Liverpool Stadium was closed down in 1985 and demolished in 1987. Interview with Jim Jenkinson, June 2014 and George Wiggins June 2014. Best had been the boxing promoter of the previous Liverpool Stadium on Pudsey Street, but that was a multipurpose arena that was in need of renovations; it was cold, it was poorly lit, and most importantly, it did not accommodate enough spectators. It also had many blind spots – specifically columns/supports that obstructed the view of spectators and made boxing shows difficult for fans to watch. Best wanted a boxing stadium that was made for boxing first and foremost. He found the perfect place for the new stadium to be built, but it had one major drawback – it was on the site
known to boxers and fans alike, was located on Bixteth Street, then a popular thoroughfare in the heart of the warehouse district in downtown Liverpool.\textsuperscript{33} It contained a gymnasium "replete with every modern training device" for boxers, and also included several dressing rooms, baths and showers, and lights that produced a whopping "35,000 candle power."\textsuperscript{34} Opening night on October 20\textsuperscript{th} 1932 sold out, with a crowd of over 5,000.\textsuperscript{35} Jonny Best took pride in the fact that Liverpool Stadium was a sort of "nursery" for boxing hopefuls, a training ground where one can learn the boxing craft before heading up to the big time championship fights.\textsuperscript{36} As Sydney Dye, Liverpool boxing reporter for the \textit{Liverpool Echo} wrote, "Since those (early) days virtually every British fighter worthy of his salt has made at least one Liverpool appearance…"\textsuperscript{37} Banasko’s first major fight took place at Liverpool Stadium, as well as most of the Nigerian fighters that he managed. The Stadium became a second home to many Nigerians.

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\textsuperscript{33} "Grand Opening Programme of the Stadium 1932." Liverpool Archives: HQ796.83 STA – Liverpool Stadium: Cuttings and Views, 1932-1957

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{35} The Stadium was built in the "modern style" with a saucer shape, so that no viewing obstructions were possible. Because of the view and large seating capacity, the Stadium also became a site for wrestling shows, political rallies, union meetings, pageants, and what we would call trade shows today. But it was boxing that made the Stadium famous (and profitable) and was its number one attraction. In fact, because of the location (graveyard), and the fact that on opening night in 1932, 3 British champions lost their titles, the Stadium became known as the ‘Graveyard of Champions.’ Interview with Jim Jenkinson, Liverpool, England, June 2012

\textsuperscript{36} Liverpool Archives: HQ796.83 STA – Liverpool Stadium: Cuttings and Views, 1932-1957. “Sydney Dye ‘Graveyard of Champions.’”

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
Boxing in Liverpool after WWII was at its highpoint of popularity and participation, with the Stadium and Johnny Best putting on a show every Thursday. The vast unemployment in England after the war, coupled with the devaluation of the Pound Sterling, meant that boxing promoters after the war searched England for fighters, paying large sums of money to local fighters. Because of these factors, cities like Liverpool, and many others in the hotbed of boxing in Northern England, attracted many working class laborers towards boxing as a career, or at the very least to supplement their income. In fact, by 1949, there were over 5,000 boxers who held licenses to fight with the British Boxing Board of Control (BBBC), and an average of 1000 fight promotions per month were being staged across Britain. At the time, boxing gyms and arenas were popular places, with lots of young hungry fighters waiting in the wings to make it big. As Terry Carson explained, his brother was a boxer, and several boys in his apartment complex were as well; “what else was I supposed to do?” But the talented boxers were not forthcoming, and many promoters complained that there were not enough really good “world beaters” being bred in Britain.

Nigerian boxers first arrived on the scene in Liverpool due to the continuing popularity of boxing in postwar Liverpool. Even as the number of British boxers

39 See chapter 4 in Makinde, Dick Tiger.
40 Ibid., 38.
42 Interview with Terry Carson, Liverpool, England, June 2014.
declined, Liverpool continued to attract Nigerian boxers and they filled the void that British boxers left. D.J. Collister must have seen this need for more boxers, and knowing the caliber of several Nigerian fighters himself, he might have suggested to bring them over to try their hand against British boxers. Although 1948 saw the dismantling of the colour bar thanks to the BNA and Turpin’s victory over a white boxer, without the culture of enthusiasm and infrastructure for boxing in Liverpool itself, Nigerians would have had few options for places to make boxing a career outside Nigeria. Furthermore, they were needed to keep boxing alive in Liverpool. While there were a great many boxers in the clubs and gyms, by the early 1950s there was a drop in the number of professional British fighters for a few reasons. First, the recovery of Britain towards full employment meant that fewer laborers were willing to fight for a few pounds sterling when they had steady jobs. Second, even fewer British men saw boxing as a viable career, with more and more being part-time fighters. The arrival of Empire fighters, therefore, alleviated these problems – they came as full-time fighters, they had talent, and they wanted to box.  

Collister and Farnsworth, through their employment in trade companies, facilitated the movement of Nigerian boxers to Liverpool. Liverpool’s trade connection with West Africa meant that many large companies were headquartered in Liverpool. P.N. Davies argues that the continuing and frequently remade trade connections between Liverpool and Lagos over the previous century brought Lagos into the world

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economy through the efforts of large Liverpool companies like Elder Dempster.\textsuperscript{45} Lagos was a principle provider of palm kernels, cotton, palm oil, cocoa, and groundnuts to Liverpool.\textsuperscript{46} As Olukoju argues, Lagos was the premier port in West Africa, and as such was home of many Liverpool companies’ external operations and trade hubs staffed by mostly native Liverpudlians.\textsuperscript{47} These companies sent hundreds of employees across West Africa in places like Lagos and Accra, employees like Douglas Collister (United Africa Company) and Jack Farnsworth (British West Africa Company or BWAC), who came to Lagos during and after WWII. Like the colonial administrators examined in Chapter 2, both Farnsworth and Collister were products of the British sporting school ethos. Both had come from Liverpool, both were schoolboy athletes, sportsmen, and, most importantly, both were boxing aficionados in the Liverpool circuit. As we saw in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, both played an incredible part in Lagos in the creation of professional and amateur boxing. Furthermore, both Collister and Farnsworth through their boxing connections in Liverpool were friends with Peter Banasko.

The British Nationality Act of 1948

WWII was a watershed moment in Britain, just as it was in Lagos. Political developments in Britain, connected to the economic factors described previously, also facilitated the influx of Nigerian boxers to Liverpool and Britain.


\textsuperscript{47} Olukoju, “Maritime Trade in Lagos,” 119.
After WWII, Britain was devastated and in need of rebuilding. The new Labour Government was expanding the welfare state, and with the loss of life from war and the need for labor to rebuild, a labor shortage ensued, which required Britain to lean once again on its empire. In an attempt to fill the gap in labor, the British government in 1948 enacted the British Nationality Act (BNA) which redefined all those born or naturalized within the British Empire from British Subjects to ‘Citizens of the Empire.’ Any citizen was now allowed to travel to any part of the Empire, provided that they could obtain a passport, pay for the fare, and have a sponsor willing to take responsibility for their well-being. As with most laws, the effects were often far different than the intention. The original intent of the BNA was to entice whites from the Dominions (Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand) to come and work in the British Isles and help with the recovery of Britain after WWII. In actual fact, the act enabled the freer movement of black Empire citizens, creating the largest influx of colonial peoples to Britain until that point.48

The first of the immigrant groups from the Empire were the Barbadians and Jamaicans. According to Marcus Collins, “Of all the immigrants arriving in Britain in the middle of the twentieth century, none attracted as much attention from whites as West Indian men.”49 This is understandable, as they were the first group of non-whites to settle en masse in Britain, with 10,000 arriving during WWII – more than the entire pre-


war figure for all of Britain.50 For Collins, June 21st, 1948 is “year zero for mass black migration” to the British Isles since that was the date when the ship *Empire Windrush* arrived carrying many Jamaican migrants.51 Part of this initial migration were boxers like Jamaicans Black Bond and Boot Cameron, Barbadian Ivor Germain, British Guyanian Kid Tanner, and Nigerian Sammy Wilde. As Nigerians were now able to travel with less restriction to Britain, Liverpool was a popular destination because it was the first port of call for those traveling by boat, and it already had an established Nigerian and West African section of the city. Many Nigerian and colonial seamen called Liverpool home. While African boxers were always part of this wave of immigration, they perceived that they were not always welcome. One event signaled the changing attitude towards black boxers in England, one that was reported in all the newspapers: British-born black Dick Turpin won the British Championship.

**Dick Turpin and the Colour Bar on Boxing**

For several years after the war Dick Turpin was denied a chance to fight for the British Championship because of his color, even though it was widely recognized that his skill was superb.52 Finally, on 28th June 1948, one week after Collins’ “Year Zero”

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50 Although two-thirds of this wartime migration were repatriated back to the West Indies, those that stayed formed the nucleus of a thriving black community that began in earnest in June 1948. Collins, “Pride and Prejudice,” 391.

51 Ibid.

52 “Dick Turpin, 1948, Killed the Colour Bar: Middleweight was First British Title to go to a Coloured Man” *Liverpool Echo*, October 1, 1949. Turpin’s father had served in WWI and was part of the gas attacks on the Somme. He came back from the war but “was never the same.” He died of “complications” from his war injuries. The Turpins were born in Warwick and, like their father before them, served for the British army during wartime. Dick Turpin had served two years in WWII in the 8th Army Regiment in the Western Desert, while his brother Randolph had served as a cook for the Royal Navy. They had been boxers before and during the war, and when the war was finished, they wanted a fair shot at the British Championship – something they thought of as their right. The Turpins argued that their ability to fight for
described above, Dick Turpin was given his chance. Turpin beat the white champion Vince Hawkins, which skyrocketed his fame within Britain and all over the Empire. As the *Liverpool Echo* proclaimed in 1949, “Thus did the first coloured man capture a British boxing title and in doing so end for ever a ban which was monstrous to our modern and enlightened conception of a democratic way of life.”\(^{53}\) Turpin’s victory was heralded in Britain as proof of Britain’s “enlightened” and “modern” ways since only there could a colored man have had the opportunity to win such a prize. However, in Nigeria and other colonies, pictures of the new black champion standing over the white former champion were eagerly consumed by a boxing hungry people in search of a black hero. Turpin was proof for Nigerians of the possibilities of fame and a form of equality through boxing. When Turpin won the title, he made the front page of the *Nigerian Daily Times*, which noted that, “As it is, the Turpin Brothers have revenged (the) Colour Bar which has kept the British coloured subjects for some time away from the fame and fortune of the fistic arena.”\(^{54}\) It just so happened that as Turpin was breaking the color bar, the British government was breaking the Empire bar (or restriction) on travel. This was an important moment for Nigerians, as the issue of a similar colour bar in the colonies that prevented Nigerians from obtaining high civil service positions or higher positions in large companies was a constant topic of debate. The fact that a colour bar, even in boxing, was smashed proved that the fight for change

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\(^{53}\) Ibid.

\(^{54}\) “Fillip to British Boxing Prestige” *NDT* July 2, 1948. Examples of boxer’s taking Turpin’s name as a show of respect include not only a full replica Dick Turpin who became Nigerian flyweight champion in the mid1950s, but also Kid Turpin and Young Dick Turpin.
was possible. Dick Turpin as a symbol was so popular to Nigerians that several fighters chose to name themselves after Turpin, including a Nigerian boxer of the late 1940s and early 1950s who fought under the name Dick Turpin as a sign of respect and admiration for the boxer from Britain who smashed the boxing colour bar.

Boxing was the last sport to lift a colour bar in Britain. According to John Harding, the color bar itself was under attack by the incoming post-war Labour Government as early as 1946. In fact, in 1947 Arthur Creech-Jones, then Colonial Secretary, personally commented on the boxing color bar situation: “I regard the colour bar [in boxing] as quite unjustified. I hope the [British Boxing] Board [of Control] may be persuaded to alter their practice and with that in further view of representations will be made to them.” Up until this point, colonial secretaries had been in agreement with the board on the subject, the justification being that if a white champion were to lose to a colonial subject, then civil unrest and disorder would circulate in the colonies. In fact, Charles Donmall, then Secretary of the BBBC, said in an interview in 1947 that “it is only right that a small country such as ours should have championships restricted to boxers of white parents – otherwise we might be faced with a situation where all our British titles are held by coloured Empire boxers.” Donmall was not alone in his fear, but the changes wrought by WWII and pressure from two British born black fighters, one


56 Ibid.


58 Ibid.

of which being Dick Turpin, pushed the issued. Turpin’s victory elicited hope for Nigerian boxers. Although they knew that the British National Title was off-limits to them since they were not born on British soil, the British Empire Title, open to any citizen born in the Empire, was now open for Nigerians. It became the goal of all Nigerian boxers who left for Liverpool to pursue a boxing career. By 1950, the British Empire Boxing Title became more important to British and Empire fighters than the British National Title.

**Nigerians as Empire Citizens - Coming of Sammy Wilde**

One of the first famous Nigerian boxers to emerge in this time period was Sammy Wilde. While other boxers from Nigeria were present in Britain before Wilde and before the 1948 fall of the colour bar, Wilde was the first to be covered in detail in Lagosian newspapers. Known in Nigeria as Sammy Davies, Wilde’s first fight was in April 1948 and he started his professional career with an exceptional win rate — winning 11 of his first 12 fights in England.\(^6^0\) Wilde named himself after British boxer Jimmy Wilde, an homage to the former British world champion whose powerful punches helped him conquer the flyweight class. Wilde was an internationally well-known boxer and made instructional boxing movies which possibly were shown in Nigeria. At the very least, ads with Jimmy Wilde appeared in Lagosian newspapers during the interwar and WWII years. Sammy Wilde was based in Liverpool, and had four of his first five fights at the Stadium.\(^6^1\) As he defeated British opponent from Liverpool one after the other, a call went out to white fighters in the country to step up for the pride of England that might

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stand a chance against him in the ring. In July 1949 to he was set to fight Alby Hollister from London, and the match was listed at the top of the bill at the Stadium, a rare feat for a black fighter. Wilde won this contest handily, and his strength and punching power, not to mention his stamina, were praised in the newspapers in Liverpool. Moreover, Wilde’s success and drawing power, it is reasonable to assume, led Banasko and other Liverpool promoters to search for talent in West Africa and Nigeria specifically for more boxers like him.

Wilde’s success was covered all over the Empire, making headlines in England, Scotland, and most importantly, in his homeland Nigeria. The *Nigerian Daily Times* (*NDT*) reported in October 1949 that Wilde was to fight in London at the age of only 22, and that he had become an “English favourite” because of his “hard punching” and “all-action style.” His victories were closely followed back in Nigeria, like in 1948 when it was reported that Wilde was featuring in many “knockout fights in English rings” and how his recent fight was the first “Black v White” fight ever in Morecambe in the North of Liverpool. The *NDT* reminded readers of the boxer roots by recounting that Wilde should be familiar to Lagosian fans because of his “stormy encounter [in Lagos] with the

62 The top of the bill meant that this was the headline fight for the promotion, the last fight of the evening and what would be the main draw to attract fans to pay for the fight. When looking at fight bills, their names would be the largest and upfront. It would be assumed by those reading the fight bill that the topliners would be well known or at least a reputation about them would be known. This fight against Hollister, however, was seen as “Wilde’s biggest test since he arrived here. Wilde’s only defeat in his last twelve contests was against Billy Coloulias. Personally, I thought that the coloured boxer had won. Wilde is prone to take things easy at times…. Wilde has made great strides since he came to this country and will improve even more as he gains experience.” The Stork, “Boost to British Boxing: Empire Visitors are the ‘Goods’,” *Liverpool Echo*, July 27, 1949.


64 Morecambe is a coastal town located north of Liverpool and close to the English city of Lancashire. “Sammy Wilde in England” *NDT* Nov. 2, 1948.
late Billy Petrolle."\textsuperscript{65} Wilde was also making headlines in English newspapers beyond Liverpool, and these accounts were reprinted in Nigerian papers. In November 1948, the *NDT* reprinted an article by S.P. Worker from Northampton, where Wilde was known as ‘The Yoruba Tribesman with the big punch.’\textsuperscript{66} It is worth quoting in detail because it shows both the novelty of Nigerian fighters and the racial stereotyping of black fighters in Britain:

Sammy Wilde is the name, and he is 160 pounds of Ebony Dynamite who packs a punch to put away the best…The way Sammy came here is a story in itself. For years he worked in the docklands of his native Nigeria listening wistfully in the evenings after his days’ work was done to the tales told by the visiting sailors of the way in which a boxer, black or white, is treated according to his ability in the Mother Country… His victory excited the curiosity of the fans, as did the three deep scars upon each cheek which, upon enquiry turned out to be old tribal marks and not the result of boxing. His long reach and height (5 ft. 10 ins) enabled this coloured whirlwind to favour long-rang hitting… He is looking farther ahead than most people would imagine. This quiet, well-spoken, most unassuming ex-dock-hand from Nigeria. His ambition is to be the first Yoruba tribesman to win a world’s championship at the middleweight limit.\textsuperscript{67}

For young Nigerians, boxing hopefuls or otherwise, this story about Wilde felt familiar to many Nigerians – he was a manual laborer, impressed by the diverse stories heard in a port city like Lagos, dreamed of a more equitable social situation where one’s talent in boxing, not skin color, was the determining factor for success. As a dock worker, Liverpool was a similar city with a similar composition of people to Lagos in terms of occupations and classes, and so his story appealed to the people there too.

\textsuperscript{65} Alternate spellings include Billy Petrolle. Petrolle was the former Nigerian champion during the war years. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{66} “Black Threat in English Rings – ‘160LB of Ebony Dynamite’ is Sammy Wilde” *NDT* Nov. 25, 1948.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
If boxing was indeed such an avenue for social mobility, Sammy Wilde was Nigeria’s finest example to date and one to be emulated. In fact, in 1950 a young boxer from Lagos, fought by the name “Young Sammy Wilde” in homage, respect, and hopefully to be as successful as Sammy. As mentioned in Chapter 5, naming oneself after a famous boxer was the ultimate show of respect, and was one sign of the impact that boxer had had internationally. As Wilde’s popularity grew in British Rings, so too did it inspire those in Nigeria, as his picture was found on many sports pages in 1949. Wilde helped to make the image of Nigerian boxers synonymous with “powerful,” “strong,” and “great stamina,” but also that of a “gentleman” and one who possessed “character.”

Wilde’s example led to the emergence of Banasko as the connection between Liverpool and Nigerian boxers by 1949. After hearing of the success of other Empire boxers in Liverpool, especially Wilde’s success, Israel “Battling” Boyle stowed away on a vessel docked in Lagos in 1949 heading to Liverpool in order to box professionally. After acclimatizing to British weather and food, he took up Peter Banasko as a manager. By the early 1950s, he was making a name for himself on the North-East coast of Britain, winning 14 straight fights at one point and boxing in the Liverpool Stadium on several occasions. “Boyle is fast, tough and a clever boxer” and thrilled

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69 For example, see *NDT* Sept. 26, 1949.


crowds with his speed and footwork. Many fighters had trouble and could “show no defence against the accurate punching of Boyle.” Boyle, like Wilde before him, was an important trail blazer in creating a Nigerian ‘style’ or type of boxer that Liverpool fans came to associate with Nigerians. Because of these two, Nigerian boxers were respected and were even in demand with promoters. Furthermore, Boyle helped a number of Nigerians he had boxed with travel to Liverpool through his connection to Banasko, and even hosted many of them personally when they arrived. Boyle was one of the first to find success in the ring in Liverpool, and was ranked in *Ring Magazine* during 1951, a feat that was mentioned several times in the Lagosian newspapers, who followed his every fight. It was well known that Banasko was his manager. Although it is assumed that Banasko came into contact with Farnsworth and Collister while he was a boxer in Liverpool in his youth, it is also reasonable to assume that Banasko came into contact with Farnsworth and Collister through Boyle, who was known to both in Nigeria.

In an interview, Banasko’s son offers insight into how Banasko forged a link between Liverpool and Nigerian identity through boxing. What made Banasko successful, in his son’s estimation, was that Banasko put on the gloves and sparred with his boxers to teach them the skills and tricks of the trade. Banasko did more than simply train and manage the Nigerians that came to Liverpool. He and other managers were responsible financially for them, essentially acting as sponsors for them while they

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75 See Hogan Bassey, *Bassey on Boxing*.

76 Interview with Peter Banasko Jr., Liverpool, England, June 2014.
were in the UK. Before a boxer was sent to Liverpool to Banasko, he had to fund the fare to England, which was out of reach for most of the boxers. Hogan Bassey, like any other boxers, was given the money to travel to Liverpool by local boxing aficionados like Nap Peregrino and Jack Farnsworth, on the condition that if they make it in Liverpool and win some money, they pay back their Nigerian handlers. The boxer also had to sign a contract with Banasko, which he would then give to the “Authorities” in England to approve the boxer’s passage and later to secure a boxing license through the British Boxing Board of Control. Banasko further had to secure a definitive address for the boxer before Nigerian authorities would grant a passport.

Banasko’s relationship with Farnsworth and Collister matured and the trust between them grew during their joint efforts to direct all Nigerian boxers towards him, even those presently in Britain. For example, Teddy Odus came to England after 1948, but not to Banasko, and worked in London. Although he was finding success in London, Farnsworth and Collister were concerned that he was not being managed properly and squandering his chance at success. Farnsworth and Collister tried their best to get him over to Banasko and to the “North” where boxing was “better” for Nigerians to grow.

77 Letter from Jack Farnsworth to Peter Banasko, 9 September 1951. Given to Author by Peter Banasko, Junior.

78 Letter from Jack Farnsworth to Peter Banasko, 9 September 1951. Given to Author by Peter Banasko, Junior. Later, after Bassey began to make a name for himself and won some money, Farnsworth sent a series of angry letters to Banasko complaining that not only had Bassey not repaid him for his fare, but had not acknowledged his role either. Peter junior in our interview also remembered that fighters paid half or more of their first purse to Farnsworth for him fronting the ticket to Britain.

79 Ibid.

80 Letter from Jack Farnsworth to Peter Banasko, 13 September 1951. Given to Author by Peter Banasko, Junior.

81 Letter from Jack Farnsworth to Peter Banasko, 2 October 1951. Given to Author by Peter Banasko, Junior.
So sought after was Banasko that his stable of boxers grew to over 25 boxers by 1951, of whom, recalled his son, “90% were Nigerian.”

Banasko’s reputation in Nigeria as an excellent manager spread to the Gold Coast. Thanks to the praises of Collister in his news reports and Farnsworth’s articles in Nigerian newspapers and through word of mouth in Lagos, managers in the Gold Coast wanted their boxers sent to Banasko as well, since their boxers were/could be mistreated by their managers in Britain. Although the Gold Coast’s Roy Ankrah (“The Black Flash”) was already a successful boxer in the UK and even won the British Empire Featherweight Title in 1951, there were many in the Gold Coast that were unhappy with the way that his UK manager treated and underpaid him. Similarly, word traveled to Farnsworth from “Surpriser Sowah,” a former boxer and manager in the Gold Coast, that the Ghanaian boxers were left to fend for themselves, which caused managers in the Gold Coast to warily send their fighters to the UK for fear of mistreatment. Word of Banasko’s fair and just treatment, and his knowledge of the fight game steered many West African fighters his way. One of these fighters became bigger than the rest, and made Banasko famous: Hogan “Kid” Bassey from Nigeria.

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82 Interview with Peter Banasko, Junior, June 2014, Liverpool, England.


84 Letter from Jack Farnsworth to Peter Banasko, 18 September 1951. Given to Author by Peter Banasko, Junior.
Hogan “Kid” Bassey

Hogan Bassey, became a household name and national hero to Nigerians through his success as a boxer in Liverpool. Bassey came to Liverpool in 1951 to work with Banasko through the sponsorship of Jack Farnsworth. Bassey had become famous in Lagos after winning the Nigerian Bantamweight Championship against Steve Jeffra in 1950. He solidified his status as a top boxer when he later that year secured the West African Bantamweight Championship by defeating Spider Neequayo of the Gold Coast in a highly anticipated fight. Following his win with Spider Neequayo he started to contemplate making “the trip to Britain, the Mecca of boxing [because] there was no chance of earning much money in Nigerian boxing.” Money was the pressing issue because Bassey could not afford to the passage to Britain, but his connection to Jack Farnsworth and D.J. Collister paid off. Collister vouched for Bassey as a talented boxer, having seen many of Hogan’s fights in Lagos as a referee, judge, or spectator before his retirement. Farnsworth, convinced that Bassey would make it big in Britain where the competition was stronger and the purses bigger, fronted Bassey the money for his ship ticket, to be repaid once he won some fights.

When Bassey arrived in Liverpool in December 1951 he was met at the Liverpool landing stage by none other than Jack Farnworth (who was at home on leave) and his old boxing friend and club mate Israel “Battling” Boyle. Also with Farnsworth and Boyle

85 Bassey, Bassey on Boxing, 14-15

86 Ibid.,15.

87 Letter from Jack Farnsworth to Peter Banasko, dated 13th Aug 1951 given to author by Peter Banasko Junior. Also see Hogan Bassey’s description in Bassey on Boxing, 16.
was Peter Banasko, his new manager. Bassey’s arrival from the Empire was reported in the newspapers in Liverpool for several weeks, and Bassey and company went straight to the offices of the *Liverpool Echo*, where he met the boxing columnist Joe Wiggal, a.k.a. “the Stork,” for an interview and picture to place in the next day’s newspaper. By the time Bassey, the last of the major Nigerian ‘pioneers’, arrived, Liverpool fans had become accustomed to seeing Nigerian boxers in the ring and knew what to expect if their name was on a fight card: tough, fit, powerful, gentlemen.

Bassey mentioned that after he arrived in Liverpool, and was waiting for his boxing license to arrive, he talked and trained with Banasko in order to be fully prepared for his Liverpool debut. Bassey in a short time realized the importance of the upcoming match and wrote in his autobiography that he really wanted win here because it “was the home of my manager” Banasko. But it was also the “cradle of boxing” in England, a place that he had no doubt heard about from Liverpudlian expatriates like Farnsworth and Collister.

But the transition to Liverpool boxing was not easy, and Bassey himself found out firsthand that although he was a triple champion in Nigeria:

My Nigerian record did not mean anything over [in England] and I had to start at the bottom of the ladder. I came as an unknown as far as the English boxing followers were concerned. They had never heard of Hogan (Kid) Bassey outside Nigeria, so I was a new boy to them, one who had to stake his claim and prove his ability there, no matter what his rating in his own country.

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89 Ibid.
91 Ibid, 21.
Bassey was an incredible talent, and his victories inspired many young men in Nigeria to take up boxing, or at the very least, to follow his career through the newspapers. Bassey’s picture would feature often in the newspaper, commonly with Banasko by his side or other Nigerian fighters. Bassey, through his victories inside the ring and his gentlemanly demeanor outside the ropes, quickly became one of the most recognizable Nigerians in the world, and certainly its most famous sportsman.

By the mid-1950s Bassey had become a household name in Nigeria as well as Liverpool due to the reporting of Douglas J. Collister. Collister had made boxing his life after retiring from the UAC in 1950. His retirement did not stop his reporting, as he cabled news stories back to Lagos, reporting on Nigerian and other West African fighters, their wins and losses, and how they fared in Liverpool and England. He essentially made sure that Nigerians were up to date on how their local heroes were representing them abroad, while also showcasing these former local stars. These were the only reports in Nigerian newspapers of Nigerians abroad attaining fame and stature. Collister also joined the BBBC as one of the Stewards in the Northern region, a position he used to make sure that Nigerian and West African boxers were well taken care of.

Once the Empire Championships took on a new meaning and were more hotly contested than British Championships, Collister was instrumental in organizing an Empire Boxing Board of Control, which until the 1950s was non-existent. He then became the steward for West Africa, further ensuring the fair treatment, when possible, of Nigerian boxers. While Banasko might have had the most success in training

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92 Interview with “the Professor,” Ibadan, Nigeria, June 2013.
Nigerians, they would not have found as much success without the careful oversight of Collister.

**Banasko and Bassey Part Ways**

Unfortunately for Nigerians, Banasko quit the business in 1955 after a falling out with Hogan Bassey. A few weeks after winning the British Empire Championship in 1955, Hogan Bassey decided to dump Banasko as his manager because he believed that it would not be possible for him to make it to the top of the World Featherweight division with a black manager. As Peter Banasko Junior recalled, Bassey had said that “he had gone as far as he could with a coloured manager.”\(^{93}\) The racism of the era that had prevented Banasko from fighting for a British Championship seemed now to resurge and knock him back a second time. Bassey’s decision to drop Banasko angered and disappointed Banasko to such a degree that instead of continuing as a boxing manager and trainer, he quit the business entirely.\(^{94}\) When Banasko left, other white promoters filled the void, men like Buddy Martins of Birkenhead who inherited many of Banasko’s boxers.\(^{95}\) Banasko sold the contract of Bassey, the British Empire Featherweight Champion, to George Biddles for £5000.\(^{96}\)

The Nigerian boxers that Banasko shaped, through the assistance of Farnsworth and Collister, helped to make a name for Nigeria. As racial myths transformed, so did

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\(^{93}\) Interview with Peter Banasko, Junior, Liverpool, England June 9\(^{th}\) 2014.

\(^{94}\) Ibid.

\(^{95}\) Birkenhead is located on the west side of the Mersey River that separates it from Liverpool.

\(^{96}\) £5000 in 1955 is the equivalent to roughly £294,000 in 2015. Biddles was his manager when he won the world title in 1957. [https://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/relativevalue.php](https://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/relativevalue.php)
Nigerian boxers’ affiliations with Liverpool. They were not a large number in Liverpool as a whole, never more than several dozen at a time from Nigeria. However, Nigerian boxers were well known entities in the city. Hogan Bassey was described in 1951 as "domiciled" in Liverpool, as this was considered a temporary home for him; it was expected that he would return to Nigeria after his fighting career ended. Significantly, by 1956, and on the verge of winning the World Featherweight Championship, Bassey was described as a Liverpudlian. “Hogan is looking forward to this trip and although he is not a native of Liverpool he can almost be called a Liverpudlian, for he has lived here for almost four years and married a Liverpool girl. One thing is certain, Bassey will not let us down for both inside and outside the ring he is a perfect gentleman.”97 Bassey would later win the Empire and World championships in the Featherweight division in 1955 and 1957 respectively, an accomplishment that, along with his proper attitude and gentlemanly character, had newspapers in Liverpool proclaim him to be a native ‘Liverpudlian’ and not just domiciled there.

The Nigerian boxers, Hogan Bassey and Dick Tiger among them, had a profound impact on Liverpool. In fact, the music scene reflected and enhanced their fame and that of Nigeria across the Empire. These boxers were regulars at the bars and music dens. Their popularity and fame from winning Empire and World Championships, had an impact on several musicians from the Empire present in Liverpool. For example, Lord Kitchener, a West Indies Calypso singer, was living in Liverpool in the 1950s and wrote two songs, one about Dick Tiger and one about Hogan ‘Kid’ Bassey. Each of

these was recorded with the accompaniment of the West African Rhythm Brothers and became popular Liverpool songs. Moreover, several key musicians that grew up playing in the taverns of Liverpool became major players in their countries, like Fela Kuti of Nigeria, and also a major influence on the Beatles as they were emerging in 1960s Liverpool. It was the physical experiences of racism and success of those within the Black Atlantic that fueled the intellectual fire. The successes of these boxers internationally and on an Empire and later World stage also fueled the imagination of the modern Nigerian within the Black Atlantic.

98 Both can be listened to here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPo-ok9O9XI
CHAPTER 7
“BAN THIS CRUEL SPORT BOXING”: DEATH IN THE RING AND THE LEGITIMACY OF BOXING

“He Walked from the Ring to the Grave”

At a boxing promotion in June of 1953, lightweight Dapo “Homicide” Ilori was knocked out by his opponent Eddie Phillips in the 4th round of an eight round fight. Ilori, as seen in Figure 7.1 had to be helped out of the ring and later complained of feeling “exhausted.”¹ He was taken to Lagos’ General Hospital by Jack Farnsworth, secretary of the Nigerian Boxing Board of Control (NBBC), where he died of his injuries at 3:30 am.² This made the front pages of Lagos’ newspapers, including a picture of a knocked-out and dazed Ilori on the canvas with the ominous headline “The Last Punch” (Figure 7-2).³ The headline in the *West African Pilot* was equally disturbing: “He Walked from the Ring to the Graveyard.”⁴

To make matters worse, another match occurred on the very same fight card between Salau Chiko and Billy Armstrong for the Nigerian Featherweight Title that had a similar outcome. Armstrong, although winning most of the fight in several reporters’ eyes, took a barrage of punishment from Chiko (Figure 7-3) in the 10th round, and was knocked out unconscious for the ten count, as captured in the picture printed the next day by the *Nigerian Daily Times (NDT)* (Figure 7-4 and Figure 7-5). Armstrong

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¹ “Billy Armstrong Still Lying in Hospital” *WAP* July 1, 1953; and “Ilori Dies after KO: Armstrong Still Unconscious” *NDT* July 1, 1953. The picture of Ilori knocked out made the front page of the paper.


³ Ibid.

⁴ “He Walked from the Ring to the Graveyard.” *WAP* July 1, 1953.
remained unconscious for 5 days in a coma in the General Hospital.\textsuperscript{5} Despite these two bad outcomes, the newspapers reported these fights as being full of excitement for “the cheering crowd,” with fast and furious punching, and some of the best boxing seen in Lagos for quite some time.\textsuperscript{6} The fact that the fans enjoyed such carnage was an alarming development for certain Lagosians who had always viewed boxing with reservations.

Eddie Phillips, the boxer who knocked out Ilori, who was only 19 at the time, decided to retire; he stated that “I will never wear the gloves again in my life.”\textsuperscript{7} He eventually returned to the ring and fought again. But the boxing fraternity was visibly shaken by Armstrong’s coma and Ilori’s death, and a debate over the place of boxing in an enlightened Nigeria ensued.

The debate over boxing started shortly after the death of Ilori. Bishop S.C. Phillips, known locally in Lagos as the “Fighting Parson” for his scathing stances on social justice issues and the fact that he himself was a former boxer, wrote several articles deploiring boxing and calling for its nationwide ban in Nigeria.\textsuperscript{8} Although the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[6] “Billy Armstrong Still Lying in Hospital” \textit{WAP} July 1, 1953; “Chiko Wins Title by Knock-out” \textit{NDT} June 30, 1953. Chiko had long been considered a lazy fighter but with powerful punches. The press also described him as not being scientific enough in his boxing, but he was a crowd pleaser based on his ability to score knockouts. The love/hate relationship the press had for him is best described by a quote in the \textit{NDT} for the date above: “Chiko has every appearance of being a lazy boxer but he unleashes a terrific flurry of blows when he thinks his opponent is in trouble.”
\item[8] Bishop Philips’s critiques were common in Lagosian newspapers after WWII when he condemned to what he saw as evils to national progress. For example, Bishop S.C. Phillips, “Drinking and Smoking” \textit{NDT} July 23, 1947. Drinking and smoking “will prove the greatest indirect obstacle to our national progress so dear to the heart of many in Nigeria of to-day.” “Intoxicants and Cigarettes have now taken the lead among the most modern luxuries which are proving most injurious to our immediate and future progress.”
\end{footnotes}
Bishop himself was a former boxer, he saw the death of Ilori as the final straw and what should be the final nail in the coffin for boxing. According to Bishop, boxing was carnage, it was uncivilized, and made for poor citizens when Nigerians needed to become more civilized on its path towards self-government and eventual independence. Boxing in his mind was related to death, and potentially the death of the nation if allowed to continue. He wanted to know: Did Nigeria want to be known as a blood-thirsty, savage nation in the eyes of the rest of the world?\(^9\)

A few days later, Horatio Agedah – a former school boy boxer in Lagos and later sports reporter who commonly went by the pseudonym “TKO”- wrote several articles in response to Bishop’s negative portrayal of boxing in Nigeria.\(^{10}\) He set out to prove that boxing was in fact doing great work in the community and the country at large by making boys into strong men and thus proper citizens during the changing and difficult times of post-WWII Nigeria. Unlike the Bishop, Agedah believed that boxing taught lessons in character, sportsmanship, and discipline that the regular curriculum in schools were unable to provide. Moreover, the prestige of Nigerians boxing internationally in Britain served to place Nigeria on the map at a time when Nigeria was a little known British colony on the international radar.

The debate between the Bishop and Agedah and the larger debates about the fate of boxing revolved around three social and political concerns about cultivating men, making/educating Nigerian citizens, and presenting their country in the international

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\(^{10}\) TKO is a boxing acronym for Technical Knock Out, the form of victory when the referee stops the bout before a boxer is actually knocked out for the 10 count. Kabir Alabi Garba, “Horatio Agedah’s Excting Times With Career, Tradition” *Nigerian Guardian* August 3, 2002.
When read contextually, the boxing debate was in part a response to larger social issues: The Kano Riots in 1953, the breakdown of the 1950 MacPherson Constitution, and the improper education of young boys who will one-day fail as citizens or men. With this in mind, this chapter will analyze the intersection between sports and the challenges in creating a nation in the international arena. More specifically, it suggests that the debate about the legitimacy of boxing reflected Nigerians' conceptualization of, and anxiety about, shaping an ideal nation and ideal masculine citizens as it prepared for first self-government and later full independence.

“Independence in 1956!”

The 1950 MacPherson Constitution (MC) expanded the electorate while also splitting the central government of Nigeria into three regions: Western, Eastern, and Northern, with Lagos as Federal Territory. The MC also created a central legislature and a House of Representatives, with fifty percent of the seats allocated to the Northern Region, and twenty-five percent of the seats to the Western and Eastern Regions respectively. As Odumosu argues, such a breakdown of seats meant that the Northern Region was in a position to dominate politics at the center, a problem which caused tension and conflict on several occasions. However, the MC proved to be unworkable as “the advent of the general election process galvanized regional and ethnic identifications,” leading to a melding of cultural associations and political parties along

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ethno-linguistic lines.\textsuperscript{13} The result was three political parties, representing three large ethnic/language groups, dominating three separate regions.\textsuperscript{14} As Douglas Anthony has argued, “Ethnicity, though, remained an unfortunate staple of political discourse,” as the regionalization of politics from the MC pit the three regions against one another, which would eventually deteriorate into a civil war in 1967.\textsuperscript{15} Before then, this regionalization of politics created by the MC came to a head in 1953 when the discussion over a timetable for self-government boiled over into ethnic conflict.

What started the demise of the constitution was the call for “Self-Government in 1956” tabled by both the NCNC and the AG in the central legislature in early 1953.\textsuperscript{16} This was not the first time that self-government had been mentioned. Starting in 1951, the NCNC and the AG continually pushed the colonial government for Nigerian self-government in the regional assemblies. As Odumosu argues, these calls eventually crippled the MC when events at the Central Government devolved into violence in Kano in 1953.\textsuperscript{17} While both the NCNC and the AG agreed and demanded self-government by 1956 at the latest, the NPC was not onboard with the 1956 proclamation. For the NPC and its leader, the Sardauna of Sokoto, which saw the Northern Region as less

\textsuperscript{13} Falola and Heaton, \textit{A history of Nigeria}, 153.

\textsuperscript{14} The Western Region was dominated by the Action Group (hereafter AG) composed of primarily Yorubas; the Eastern Region was dominated by the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) composed of primarily of Igbos; and the Northern Region was dominated by the National People’s Congress (NPC) primarily composed of Hausa and Fulani.


\textsuperscript{16} \textit{NDT} April 1, 1953; Odumosu, \textit{The Nigerian Constitution}, 88.

\textsuperscript{17} Odumosu, \textit{The Nigerian Constitution}, 82-92; Falola and Heaton, \textit{A history of Nigeria}, 152-154.
technical, educated, and less-politically prepared for self-government by 1956, amended the “Self-Government 1956” to “Self-Government as soon as practicable.”¹⁸ What ensued in the colony following this discrepancy was a political debate that devolved into mistrust and violence and ultimately shattered the MC and placed stress on the idea of national unity.¹⁹ As Sir John MacPherson, the Governor of the Colony and author of the MC, warned, “The measure of the blow that has been dealt to the unity of Nigeria is still to be assessed.”²⁰

With its fifty percent seat allocation, the fear of many in the central legislature was that the Northern representatives would outright defeat the motion for self-government. When this actually happened, the AG and NCNC promptly walked out of the Chamber in protest. For their part, the Northern representatives’ refusal to back self-government were booed and jeered at by Lagosians outside the legislature and in the street, coming close to violence as only the presence of police stopped the crowds from rioting then and there.²¹ Furthermore, the NPC’s decision to not back the motion for self-

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¹⁸ Odumosu, *The Nigerian Constitution*, 88. Also see “North is not Ready for Self-Rule in 1956 – Says Sardauna.” NDT April 1, 1953. The Northern response was to wait longer so that the Northern region had the time to industrialize and add educational infrastructure, otherwise it would continue to be at a disadvantage nationally for jobs in the civil service to the other regions. Also, the Sardauna argued that until the masses were educated in politics, their will could not be gauged, and self-government would not necessarily help them. “Northern House of Chiefs: ‘We are Not Educated Enough to Accept Responsibility’” NDT May 26, 1953.

¹⁹ The newspapers were flooded with testimony from the various parties involved over their ideas of unity and ways to achieve it. For example, see Jaja Anucha Wachuku, a Member of the House of Representatives for the National Independence Party, who gave his testimony of the proceedings and the problems of Nigeria. “What I Said about 1956.” NDT April 24, 1953.

²⁰ “Governor Broadcasts to ‘Tell the Facts’” NDT April 2, 1953.

²¹ For example, “Crowds Jeer Northerners” NDT April 2, 1953.
government was lambasted in the local and national newspapers, a move that enraged northerners and sent fierce critiques through the newspapers.\(^{22}\)

As Odumosu argues, the motion for self-government of the regions was a convenient way for Nigerian politicians to vent their frustrations over the MacPherson Constitution, the workings of the government, the presence and rule of the British, and the slow pace of independence.\(^{23}\) They did not, however, fully appreciate the scale of distrust between the regions, and the ensuing violence and riot in Kano took the country, the British, and the international community by surprise and placed Nigeria in the international limelight for the wrong reasons.

**The Kano Riot**

In May of 1953, a riot in Kano erupted when Northerners, mainly Hausas and Fulani, attacked southern Igbos and Yorubas in an event that lasted four days, killing at least 43 and injuring more than 200 people.\(^{24}\) While tensions between the regional and political groups had been steadily smoldering, the match that lit the fire here first sparked when a group of AG representatives, headed by S.L. Akintola, the deputy leader of the AG, scheduled a tour of the Northern Region to promote the motion for self-government that was abandoned by the NPC. Their presence angered northerners in Kano who took to the streets in Sabon Gari, the residential area of Kano allocated for non-northerners. This protest eventually boiled over and led to a wave of violence,

\(^{22}\) Odumosu, *The Nigerian Constitution*, 88. Also see “Sardauna Answers Awolowo” *NDT* April 6, 1953.


\(^{24}\) “MPs. Demand Inquiry into Kano Riots” *NDT* June 1, 1953. The Action Group (AG) was the political party of Western Nigeria under the leadership of Awolowo.
looting, and death that lasted several days and made international headlines.\textsuperscript{25} As historians have shown, long-standing tension between the three groups, especially focused around education and economic opportunity, religion, and culture, lay at the heart of this outbreak of violence.\textsuperscript{26} A major reason for such tension lay in the rapid influx of foreigners in the Northern Region, primarily Igbo but also Yorubas. For example, the Igbo population in Northern Nigeria grew from roughly 12,000 in 1931 to over 125,000 in 1953, the year of the Kano Riot.\textsuperscript{27} Igbo, thought to be more “modern” than others in Nigeria because of their quick adoption of Western customs and education, were, as van den Berselaar has noted, more willing to engage in the colonial economy and migrated rather early to the mines, railroads, and cities for a whole host of social, cultural, and economic reasons.\textsuperscript{28} One such urban area was Kano, that grew as an urban area thanks in part to being the site of a railroad terminus in 1912. The number of Igbo migrants to urban centers was in fact quite large, making up between forty and fifty-five percent of urban populations in Nigeria by the 1950s.\textsuperscript{29} They tended

\begin{itemize}
  \item Odumosu, \textit{The Nigerian Constitution}, 88. For more information on the history of the Sabon Gari system, and how that system bred suspicion and distrust between ethnic groups in the North, see A. F. Usman, “Implications of Colonial Settlements on Inter Ethnic Relations: Case Study of Sabon Gari Kano” \textit{International Journal of Humanities and Social Science} 5. 10 (October 2015): 164-169.
  \item As Dmitri van den Berseelaar argues, this idea of Igbo being more “modern” than other ethnicities still holds sway in Nigeria, especially among Nigerian scholars, since it was formulated in the 1960s in Dmitri van den Berselaar, “Imagining Home: Migration and the Igbo Village in Colonial Nigeria” \textit{The Journal of African History}, 46. 1 (2005), 55.
  \item Ibid, 58.
\end{itemize}
to be overrepresented in occupations like the Civil Service, and since many traveled outside of the eastern region and took up important positions within the colonial apparatus, they came to be seen as outsiders and unwelcomed in the north. Their elevated positions along with their status as outsiders and foreigners contributed to growing tensions between Northerners and others that eventually escalated towards the riot.

This was not the first attack against Easterners in the North of Nigeria, as a similar riot occurred in Jos in 1945. It was, however, the first to be broadcasted worldwide, bringing negative publicity to the colony. The Kano Riots of 1953 have been previously seen by historians as little more than a precursor to the fall of the MacPherson Constitution and the eventual riots in the North that led to Biafran secession in 1966/7. However, the riot’s impact was felt around the country, as worries over Nigeria’s readiness to be independent and the lack of central unity quickly surfaced in the face of increasing tribalism and regionalism in the colony’s politics.

Lagosian newspapers were filled with reports of “the slaughtering of our people by our people,” which they decried as unbecoming of a nation that was on the path

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31 Although not widely reported, an incident occurred in Jos in 1945 that lasted for 2 days. Surprisingly, this ethnic feud did not make it into the newspapers, governor’s report, nor any administrative report. See Leonard Plotnicov “An Early Nigerian Civil Disturbance.”

32 An example of this can be seen in Anthony, Poison and medicine. Although Anthony discusses the importance of the riot in historical context, it is clear that his discussion links the historical roots of the 1966 riots and the role that 1953 played in a line of distrust and ethnic conflict. Also see Okwudiba Nnoli, Ethnic politics in Nigeria (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980). Also, A. F. Usman, “Implications of Colonial Settlements”

33 John White, “An Expatriate Says Farewell” NDT May 16, 1953.
towards “civilization.” Confirming this, when word of the attacks reached Britain and the United States, several newspapers there reported that this lawless behavior could severely hinder the colony’s journey to self-rule. The Manchester Guardian’s article entitled “Agitations Do Not Advance Self-Rule” was reprinted in full in the Nigerian Daily Times; the article worried that “National pride, political ambition, jealousy and misunderstanding have combined to jeopardize…a most promising experiment in political evolution…” A New York Times article said “the Nigerians are proving they are not ready for self-government in 1956.” Locally, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Northern Region, Sir Bryan Sharwood-Smith, himself echoed these international sentiments. In his radio broadcast shortly after the riot, he said that the violence and lawlessness was “a disgrace to this country” as “lawless behavior of this nature…can in a few hours bring back the clock of progress by months and even years.” Moreover, “it was possible to destroy months of progress and the good name of the Region by thoughtless acts of violence.” Indeed, Chief H.O. Davies reported that Nigeria was in need of unity first and self-government once that was achieved in order to guarantee that such violence did not occur again. For the British, it demonstrated that changes to


35 “A Disgrace to Country” NDT May 20, 1953.


38 “A Disgrace to Country” NDT May 20, 1953.

39 “Sir Bryan Broadcasts” NDT May 19, 1953.

the governing of Nigeria were necessary to prevent future such outbreaks of violence along tribal, ethnic, and/or regional lines, as well as see to it that “progress” continued toward self-rule. At the same time, it was also proof that more time was needed before Nigeria was indeed ready for self-government since national unity was not forthcoming despite the increased political activity of Nigerians thanks to the MC.

The violence of the riot prompted the British government to quickly disband the MacPherson Constitution (MC) of 1950, and denounce it as unworkable. In short, the British felt the MC was not in the best interest of the colony as the close interaction between regions at the central government was a primary cause of the violence. Furthermore, the local press was partly to blame, thought former governor Sir John MacPherson, as the “polemics” of the newspapers caused the “exciting [of] public opinion and inflaming passions.”

MacPherson was the Governor of Nigeria from 1948 to 1955 and was an avid sportsman who was heralded as one of the driving forces of the expansion of sport in the colony. Many of his speeches contained sporting euphuisms, especially when discussing the political situation in the colony. He felt that Nigerians needed to learn the lessons of sport (team work, sportsmanship, courage, and discipline) if the country was to come together despite their regional and ethnic differences. He was known to attend several sporting functions on a weekly basis. To MacPherson, the regional disparities became a major obstacle for “progress,” and MacPherson himself decried the situation as one of “jealousy, particularism, suspicion

41 Only a few days after the attack did Secretary of the State for the Colonies Oliver Lyttleton call a conference of Nigerian leaders to London. NDT 22 May 1953 – “Constitution to be Revised.” For a detailed description of the MacPherson Constitution and the subsequent constitutional crisis, see Odumosu, The Nigerian Constitution.

42 “Governor Broadcasts to the Nation” NDT May 21, 1953.
and mistrust” which “will retard the progress of this country towards self-government.”\textsuperscript{43} The solution was teamwork and sportsmanship to promote national unity, as he declared right up to his farewell address in 1955.\textsuperscript{44}

In deciding to disband the MC, British officials clearly articulated their fears that Nigerians were too violent and uncivilized, and thus not ready for self-government until some kind of national political unity could be achieved. Several months later, the British Colonial Office invited Nigerian leaders to conferences in London and later in Lagos to determine the proper way to govern and unite a country divided on ethnic, regional, and religious lines by drafting a new constitution.\textsuperscript{45} The solution was referred to as the Lyttleton Constitution, named after Oliver Lyttleton, then Secretary of the State of the Colonies, which decentered politics towards the three regions, as shown in Figure 7-6. This chain of events, however, created anxiety on every level of society. In particular, it motivated people to scrutinize sports such as boxing that might jeopardize the national character and international recognition of the emerging nation and the reputation of its citizens.

\textbf{The Debate over Boxing}

Shortly after the violence of the Kano Riots and subsequent disbanding of the MC, the death of Homicide Ilori catapulted Nigerian boxing into the spotlight. Boxing thereafter became entangled in a debate over the shape of an emerging national character, the readiness of Nigeria for self-rule, the education of youth, and the proper

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{NDT} June 10, 1955.

\textsuperscript{45} see Odumosu, \textit{The Nigerian Constitution}. 
way to shape boys and young men into useful citizens. This debate took place primarily in the Lagosian newspapers, highlighted by the writings of well-known local persons, former boxer Bishop S.C. Phillips and newspaper reporter Horatio Agedah. By looking at the debate in terms of national character, international reputation, and masculinity, we can see the reaction to, and anxiety about, important changes like the expansion of politics occurring at the local, regional, and national levels. The rhetoric of the discussion reflected the apprehension many Nigerians felt over nationalism, manhood, education, and Nigeria’s international reputation.

Figure 7-1. Picture of then Rev. S.C. Phillips, soon to be Bishop Phillips of Lagos. His commentary on social evils were commonplace in Lagosian newspapers in the 1940s and early 1950s. DS September 20, 1945. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.
Under Debate - National Character

The Kano Riots and demise of the Constitution prompted many to search for reassurance that their nation and its character was progressing as it should and that it was strong enough to enter the international arena. In connection with this, sports emerged as one aspect that could boost, or erode, national confidence. For example, the Bishop stated: “To us in this country, at least, this is becoming an age of sport,” one in which the public attended in large crowds and supported in the physical education in schools for its good social effects. 46 Like many, the Bishop saw sports as one of “the healthy forms of amusements now being spread over the country [which] are a sign of great advance in our social life.” 47 For the Bishop, sport was necessary for it filled leisure and idle time and ensured that youths stayed out of trouble. “In the days gone by, one of the main causes of mischief-making to both old and young was the difficulty of finding interesting amusements to occupy leisure hours; yet it is one of the great truths of life that Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do.” 48 Sport had its good uses, and when the proper or right sport was emphasized, the desired traits could be instilled in youth, like discipline, sportsmanship, courage, and “character.” However, boxing, at least to the Bishop, was not a proper or right sport to achieve the desired characteristics in young men.

The Bishop wished to replace boxing with Nigerian wrestling, which would better craft future citizens and proper men. Unlike boxing, wrestling was not a European

47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
import, but an indigenous sport that had trained Nigerian men for centuries. As Bishop noted, “Wrestling is the African game of contest, not fighting [or boxing]. The only reason why, contrary to our custom, such serious fights are being regularly staged in public is that the custom came from parts of the world whose so-called civilized custom must be slavishly imitated.” The Bishop saw boxing as another example of cultural imperialism that was not only unnecessary, but dangerous to the moral fabric of the up-and-coming nation because of its penchant for violence and unrestraint. It was not part of the civilizing package that Nigerians should be aspiring towards nor accepting.

Echoing the Bishop, C.A. Afodu wrote to the Daily Service arguing that boxing should be banned on religious and “civilized” grounds. “Is it not a crying shame that in this enlightened and Christian age, we can still afford to tolerate gladiators in our midst?” He asked if Nigerians were any better than the spectators at the gladiatorial competitions of ancient Rome, comparing Nigerian boxers to Roman gladiators in terms of brutality and lack of civilization. “The gory spectacle of broken nose and battered body is not a sight for Christian educated people. Brutes fight in such a way and are we a generation of brutes?” Nigeria in this case needed civilization and religious enlightenment, and boxing did not bring either, nor did it provide the path for such progress. Boxing was a throwback to an uncivilized past, where money and brutality


50 C.A. Afodu, “Ban Boxing in Nigeria” DS Nov 4 1953. Afodu says that the Bishop’s articles “are always welcomed.” That Phillips had not written for a long time but now found time to rail against boxing and Afodu agrees.

51 Ibid.
were praised. The young men in Nigeria entering boxing did so for the wrong reasons, not to learn skills and manly traits, but for money and fame. Afodu elaborated on this, writing that “Our boys seem to be lured by the prize money on each fight. Money on boxing is blood money. Scrap boxing among our national sports.”

Again, the Christian appeal emerges with the reference to blood money. Moreover, this was not the national image Nigeria wanted to project to the world nor cultivate at home. Afodu argued that since man was made in God’s image, should men then batter God? Was this enlightened Christian behavior for a nation pursuing its independence?

In contrast, Horatio Agedah argued it was not the punishment that the fan or critic should focus on; rather, the way boxing crafted qualities desired in men, making them better future citizens and displaying true national character. Moreover, many citizens were needed for the good of the country as it marched towards independence. Nnamdi Azikiwe, leader of the NCNC party, made numerous speeches extolling the values of sportsmanship and the importance of sportsmanship to the body politic. The Bishop’s comments, argued Horatio Agedah, were “an attempt to deprive our country of a most fruitful source of healthy national manhood, courageous and disciplined youth, [and]

52 Ibid. “Many people do not like the way two people are being matched against themselves to be battered as if they were in a battle, but such people lack the courage to come out and express their opinion against this fatal sport.”

53 Ibid.

54 In a similar vein, J.R. Oliver said in the NDT, “Bloodlust, to see men fight like tigers, seems to be what the boxing public want for their money. What is being sown to-day will most certainly be reaped in the future… The ‘noble art’ leads youths from the Youth Clubs nowhere in the end…” J.R. Oliver, “I support Bishop Phillips” NDT Nov. 11, 1953. Oliver praises Phillips and the NDT for printing the article. “The ‘great sport’ is inevitably degraded as soon as money enters into it, and it becomes ‘professional’ with all the hangers on who want their pickings.”


56 See Nnamdi Azikiwe, My Odyssey.
international fame and respect.” Explicit in Agedah’s response was the appeal to the importance of boxing to manhood, and manhood to national character. Boxing, for Agedah, was indeed civilized and instilled qualities in young men necessary for this generation to uplift Nigeria to international standards. Moreover, boxing was bringing Nigeria international fame and praise at a time when the disaster of the Kano Riot was fresh in international minds.

**International Reputation**

The Bishop’s demand for boxing to be banned would unravel several years’ worth of work with youth and attempts to bring international prestige to Nigeria. Agedah wanted all to know that Nigerian boxers like Hogan 'Kid’ Bassey were about to reach the pinnacle of Empire and World Championships (which he later did in 1955 and 1957, respectively) and their impact for Nigeria internationally was not worth compromising. As Jaja Anucha Wachuku, a member of the Nigerian House of Representatives, noted in April 1953 (when the MC was breaking down), “the world of today is not the world for puny, tiny, small countries that are not able to stand their ground in the comity of nations.”57 In this time of nationalism, the reputation and prestige of Nigeria on the international stage grew in importance, and one way to display that was through international sporting success. As Brian Stoddart argues:

> One immediate problem for the imperial power was that, having encouraged the measurement of social progress by comparing colonial against British achievements in sport, there would always come the day of a colonial victory that might be interpreted as symbolic of general parity.58

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As shown in Chapter 8, boxing success internationally was interpreted as Nigeria’s readiness for international parity with the United Kingdom. In 1953 boxing, and to a lesser extent the Olympic Games, were one of the few international sporting arenas where colonies could test their strength and vitality against other colonies, the white Dominions, and the British themselves. Boxing success was the only international sporting arena for Nigerians to showcase the colony. The importance of Bassey and other boxers in the march to independence will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8. Bassey’s celebrity status was growing in 1953, so much so that his return to Lagos in 1953 was front page news, right beside the problems associated with the MC, as seen in Figure 7-7. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Nigeria was making a positive name for itself internationally because of boxing, similarly to other up-and-coming nations during this time period, which had an incredible effect on nationalism.

Boxing was becoming a popular sport, so much so that Nigeria became synonymous with fighters like Hogan Bassey, Sandy Manuel, and Israel Boyle in British and European circles. This, however, prompted some to question why Nigerians were not instead regarded for their growing number of intellectuals in the UK and USA. Although boxers had gone to the UK and made a lot of money, Mr. I.A. Oni responded in kind with the Bishop: “I would like [Nigerians to] sail to the United Kingdom for medicine, law, engineering, and other refined arts rather than for boxing people’s precious teeth, dislocating jaws, and punching noses flat unprovoked.”59 This demonstrates that some Nigerians, especially following the Kano Riots, did not wish

59 I.A. Oni, “Boxing is Sadistic” NDT Nov. 11, 1953. Oni said that “generations yet unborn” will sing the praises of the bishop for his condemning of boxing.

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their nation to gain a reputation for violent acts only. Oni was mortified that people want to see men holler and cheer for blood or knock downs and yell “bully.” As Oni explained, “Yet people call this sport! It is animalistic. It is sadistic. It is a mad desire to be cruel. It should be utterly condemned.” Boxing was, in Oni’s mind, giving Nigeria a reputation for violence and sport, and not for the thousands of students and professionals that had migrated internationally, showing the world the standard of intelligence of the nation.

In response to Oni, Charles Major, himself a boxer, wrote to the *Nigerian Daily Times* explaining that banning boxing would sacrifice the great work done by Nigerians internationally. “To ban boxing in Nigeria now is just to draw back from her goal, for boxing has done nobly to place her on the sport map of the world.” He continued that “Bishop Phillips’ article, therefore, is nothing but discouragement to our heroes at home and abroad who are fighting hard to see that they bring Nigeria into sports fame.” For Major, boxers at home and abroad were doing good work and they should be rightly seen as heroes for those in Nigeria to respect and emulate. He echoed the words of others, like Douglas J. Collister (“Deejaysee”), the first chairman of the Nigerian Boxing Board of Control, who said that Bassey was the best ambassador for the up-and-coming country of Nigeria based on his gentlemanly demeanor, his discipline, and his fame. Moreover, in 1957 when Bassey was contesting the World Championship, he was recognized as Nigeria’s “ambassador of goodwill” by important figures like Matthew

60 Ibid.


62 For example, see “Our Boy Hopes to come home in January” *NDT* Sept. 3, 1955. The praises of Bassey was a regular occurrence in Collister’s articles for several newspapers like *NDT, WAP*, and *DS* from early 1953 until his retirement from boxing in 1959. For more information about the role of Deejaysee in Nigeria, see Chapter Five.
Mbu, Collister, Obafemi Awolowo, and Nnamdi Azikiwe (to name a few). As the WAP noted, “among [fans], Bassey has become a national symbol...More than most politicians, Bassey has done more to place Nigeria in the cynosure of the world.”63 Despite the work done politically by Nigerians, it was through sport that Nigerians, and especially Hogan Bassey, were making their biggest strides for Nigerian international recognition.

The discipline that boxing provided was essential for Nigerians. Concluding his argument, Charles Major explained, “Boxing has proved to be the backbone of the British Nation, the police, most Boys’ Clubs, and yourself (Bishop Phillips).”64 In other words, if Nigeria was to be elevated towards independence (which was granted in 1960), then boxing was an excellent way to achieve the necessary national character. The nation and specifically its men were lacking, as described in Chapter 3, discipline, energy, leadership, courage, and teamwork, making boxing a necessary tool for national solidarity, manhood, and citizenship. This moment in 1953 was important because the specter of independence was finally on the horizon, and the questions of manhood and citizenship were clearly on the forefront.

Masculinity and Education of Youths

To create a proper nation that was respected internationally, its inhabitants, and particularly its men, must be shaped into model citizens. This perception prompted concern about Nigeria’s youth and particularly the effects of contemporary urbanization and mal-education on them. Judging by the newspaper reports, the state of youth, and

63 “Goodluck, Bassey!” WAP June 24, 1957. Matthew Mbu was Nigeria’s Federal Minister to the UK, a position that had him placed in the UK to promote and represent Nigeria on important matters.

64 “Bishop Phillip’s Idea is Wrong Says Austin” DS Nov. 19, 1953.
the development of their “character” through sport and school remained a constant concern to Lagosians. They lacked the discipline and sportsmanship necessary to guide their nation towards independence. Although boxing was touted as a remedy for this, the Bishop and many others felt differently. The rhetoric highlights the anxiety of elite Nigerians for the future leaders of the nation, specifically what kind of men they would be and what kind of nation these new types of urban men could create.

For the Bishop, boxing did not create proper men. Although sports filled leisure and idle time and ensured that youths stayed out of trouble, boxing taught the wrong skills to Nigerian youth. Like bull fighting and gladiatorial contests, some sports like boxing “become the greatest evil, most debasing to a nation’s morality and character. They must be banned…a fight is always a fight.”65 If Nigerians were to be taught moral values in order to become moral citizens, boxing was not the sport to do it. Boxing taught nothing but fighting skills, and did not morally shape youth.

Boxing, the Bishop believed, was part of a larger problem with the kinds of entertainment that attracted youth and young men after WWII. As mentioned in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, the increased consumption of cowboy and mafia movies in Nigeria became, in the eyes of many, a bad influence on youth that was linked to violent sports. The Bishop wrote that “When one thinks of the many crimes of violence being so regularly committed in Nigeria these days one begins to wonder if exhibition of violence in our so called entertainments and sports is not partly accountable.”66 Like debates over video game violence in our own time, the exhibition of movies like cowboy or mafia

66 Ibid.
films in the 1950s that celebrated violence was seen by many to have an adverse effect on the minds of young men. The Bishop supposed that “the exciting cinema films so regularly patronized by many in these days [are] getting [the] ordinary man accustomed to enjoying such sights…that they are no longer conscious of the brutalizing effect of feeding the eyes on the boxing ring and enjoying the bloody fight.” In his eyes, boxing made thieves rather than citizens. “The secret of the boxer is the same as that of the burglar, who is usually ready to take the greatest risk to his life and limb just because he expects a haul of some thousands of pounds from some well-guarded bank. The love of money has always been the root of all evil.” It made young men blood-thirsty, barbaric, and thieves, and certainly not the “civilized” men needed to make Nigeria great. The moral base for youth should not be centered on a violent sporting and cinema culture, all of which were moreover foreign imports and non-indigenous. At a time when Nigeria was carving out its own image and personae in the international arena, calls in the newspapers for an authentic “Nigerianness” and rejection of European cultural forms were circulating.

Horatio Agedah, however, defended the noble art of boxing and its positive relationship to masculinity. He stated that “Boxing has survived as the king of sport not because it offers chances of quick money, as the Bishop erroneously believes, but because of the valuable physical and moral benefits that are derivable from active

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participation in the sport.”\textsuperscript{70} The amateur boxer was not tainted by money but fought for the glory and love of the game, for exercise, for discipline, and lastly for fun.\textsuperscript{71} Boxing, argues Agedah, taught skills inside and beyond the ring: “Boxing is not a low and dangerous sport but it is a game of skill outstanding from the point of view of its value as physical training, and in addition calling for \textit{manly qualities} of self-discipline, courage and good sportsmanship.”\textsuperscript{72} In this light, the boxer learned discipline and respect and could not just do what he wanted in the ring or society at large; he needed to follow rules, especially those of the referee or the police. In the aftermath of the Kano Riots of 1953, blamed partially on the excitability of the mob and inflamed passions of the people, boxing with its emphasis on discipline and self-control was seen by some as a possible solution to this quandary, not the cause.\textsuperscript{73}

Soon, the Bishop’s attack on boxing had reached Warri, more than 450 kilometers from Lagos near the Niger Delta, where Austin Drape wrote to the \textit{Daily Service} condemning the Bishop’s ideas. Austin believed that boxing was one of the best means of developing young boys, since the boxing gloves protected them from the damaging blows. It was not that boxers struck from a place of anger, but from a place of skill and love of the sport. “It is a human trait to strike in anger, but boxing teaches youngsters to control their cruder passions, to learn to give and take, to win and lose

\textsuperscript{70} Horatio Agedah, “Boxing is Noble Art of Self Defence” \textit{DS} Nov. 3, 1953.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid. “That is why for every professional boxer, there are hundreds of amateurs who box because they like sport, for the love of the game, and the fun and healthy exercise they derive from it.”

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid. Emphasis Added.

\textsuperscript{73} “Governor Broadcasts to the Nation” \textit{NDT} May 21, 1953.
sportingly. The boxer who cannot discipline himself gets nowhere.”  

74 Boxers like Hogan Bassey showed how discipline and not murderous rage had propelled him to the highest levels of the sport and international acclaim. The discipline that it provided was essential for Nigerians, not just the youth, but for all. If Nigeria was to be elevated towards the British in terms of civilization, boxing was an excellent way to achieve this, since “Boxing has proved to be the backbone of the British Nation, the police, most Boys’ Clubs, and yourself (Bishop Phillips).”  

75 The Bishop himself was a former boxer, reminded several writers, who had found usefulness in the sport that shaped him as well into a productive man.

Boxers were not the criminals portrayed by the Bishop; rather “Boxers are exceptionally modest, well-behaved, and not easily provoked.”  

76 It was for these reasons that boxing should be encouraged and promoted, especially in schools.  

77 Agedah claimed it was because boxing was an excellent teacher both morally and physically: Boxing was a test of skill, courage, and endurance, and in the ethos of British sport, made young boys into men and prepared them for a life of leadership, as discussed in Chapter 2. As noted above, the Bishop’s comments were “an attempt to deprive our country of a most fruitful source of healthy national manhood, courageous and disciplined youth, international fame and respect.”  

78 The Bishop’s demand for boxing to be banned would unravel decades of development with youth and attempts to

74 “Bishop Phillip’s Idea is Wrong Says Austin” DS Nov 19, 1953.

75 Ibid.

76 Horatio Agedah, “Boxing is Noble Art of Self Defence” DS Nov. 3, 1953.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.
bring international prestige to Nigeria, similar to how Sir Bryan described the Kano Riots as setting Nigeria back several years. The fact that Nigerian boxers like Hogan Bassey were about to reach the pinnacle of Empire and World Championships was not worth compromising. Boxing was a skilled endeavor for mind and body. The voices depicted in the newspapers of the time clearly enunciated their aim to fashion the young men of Nigeria into leaders that could proudly stand alongside those from Great Britain and the other prestigious nations of the world. For many, boxing was an important means by which to attain their goal.

"Nobody Can Ban Boxing"

One of the last articles, written by a man named Olufunmi, suggested that if Bishop could no longer count himself a supporter of boxing, he should leave the sport alone, since "nobody can ban boxing…But to retire and carry away with him the entire boxing ring…No, sir, we disagree."\textsuperscript{79} The articles and perceptions analyzed in this chapter indicated that for many Nigerians, boxing came to represent a gauge, for better or for worse, by which to measure the development of the nation, its international reputation, and its masculine citizens. Reflecting the intersection between sports, politics, and society, the debate that took place around boxing in the mid-twentieth century highlighted Nigerians’ perceptions of self, both within their community and on the international stage. The Bishop did not get his wish, and boxing continued.

\textsuperscript{79} Olufunmi, “Nobody can Ban Boxing” \textit{DS} Nov 13, 1953.
Figure 7-2. Picture of Homicide Ilori. *NDT* May 20, 1953. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.

Figure 7-3. Front Page photograph of Homicide Ilori in the *NDT* after being knock-out by Eddie Phillips in the 4th round of their fight. Ilori was taken to the hospital after the fight, where he died overnight. *NDT* July 1 1953. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.
Figure 7-4. Picture of Salau Chiko, Nigerian Daily Times Jan 10 1953. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.

Figure 7-5. Picture of Billy Armstrong, “in praying posture” after being knocked out in the tenth round of his featherweight championship match with Salau Chiko at Glover Memorial Hall, Lagos. NDT 1 July 1953. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.
Figure 7-6. Picture of Billy Armstrong sitting in "a huddled heap" after his knockout at the hands of Salau Chiko in the tenth round of their Featherweight Championship Fight. *NDT* July 1 1953. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.
Figure 7-7. NDT headline of the new Lyttleton Constitution which took effect Oct 1st 1954. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.
Hogan Bassey and Israel Boyle arrived. They were met by a large crowd of boxing fans, promoters, friends, and relatives. A trend that will become more common in following years, news of Bassey was frequently found on the front pages of the newspaper alongside national news. 

NDT 23 April 1953. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.
CHAPTER 8
“BASSEY...IS A HOUSEHOLD WORD IN NIGERIA”: HOW HOGAN BASSEY’S ASCENSION TO WORLD CHAMPION CHANGED MASCULINITY, NATIONALISM, AND NIGERIA

“I Was Now Champion of the World!”

On 25th June 1957, Nigerian Hogan ‘Kid’ Bassey fought against French Algerian Cherif Hamia for the World Featherweight Title in Paris, France. Hamia was favored to win the fight, and in the second round it looked like this would be the case as Hamia smashed a “vicious right cross” into Bassey’s face, sending him down to the canvas for the compulsory count of eight. Bassey recovered, and he used his stamina and patience to wear down Hamia over the next few rounds. The strategy worked, because in the eighth round Bassey shook Hamia with a staggering left hook, which sent Hamia into the ropes dazed and knocked out on his feet. Bassey continued to hammer into him until the referee, seeing that Hamia was stunned and defenseless, stepped in and stopped the fight. Bassey was now the World Champion. As Bassey wrote in his biography, “Of course I jumped in the air at my success. I was now champion of the World! I could hardly believe it, but it was a fact.” He was mobbed in the ring by fans, including famous politicians, both Nigerian and Liverpudlian, like Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, and Bessie Braddock of Liverpool. Bassey recalled that “Congratulations were heaped upon me from all sides, and in particular, I am proud to

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2 Ibid., 62.
3 Nnamdi Azikiwe was the leader of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), Obafemi Awolowo was the leader of the Nigerian political party the Action Group (AG), and Bessie Braddock was a Liberal Member of British Parliament for Liverpool and close friend of Hogan Bassey. She claimed to have seen all his fights. She was also the patron of the Professional Boxers Association in Liverpool and their gym on Parliament Street.
say, from Dr. Azikiwe and Chief Awolowo, who had both come into the ring." Bassey was heralded as a national hero, a gentleman, a sportsman, and his victory signaled the proof that Nigeria had arrived on the world stage, equal to other established nations. As Nnamdi Azikiwe said years later, Bassey “was destined to become a great ambassador of goodwill for his country.”

This chapter traces his ascension to the top of the boxing world in 1957 and examines the implications of Bassey’s victory. To understand the importance of this moment in Nigerian history, however, we must take a step back and put the victory into context. As discussed in Chapter 7, boxing was on the brink of being banned in 1953 after the death of “Homicide” Dapo Ilori and the subsequent debate over the place of boxing in an enlightened Nigeria. Yet, when Bassey won the British Empire Featherweight Title just two years later in 1955, a couple years before he claimed the world featherweight title, it became clear that boxing would remain a central part of Nigerian culture and identity. The general reaction to Bassey’s victory indicates that Nigerians believed amateur boxing performed an essential role in creating gentlemanly citizens and reforming juvenile delinquents into proper men. Furthermore, the victory served to validate boxing as a worthwhile enterprise for Nigerians to discipline proper men for an emerging nation. Finally, boxing cemented Nigerians’ place in a modern world. Moreover, the impact of Bassey’s achievement in 1955 had a lasting effect on local and national ideals of masculinity and nationalism as manliness evolved from the

4 Bassey, Bassey on Boxing, 63.
5 See Anene Ejikeme, “Hogan Bassey: Nigerian Icon”
6 Bassey, Bassey on Boxing, Forward by Azikiwe, iii.
Muscular Citizens described in Chapter 4 to a “Muscular Gentleman.” Bassey’s the World Featherweight Title fight in 1957, described on the previous page, occurred at the same time as the London Conference, which outlined the new “Independence Constitution” for Nigeria. It is both politically and culturally significant that Bassey became world champion at the same time Nigeria became self-governed and quasi-independent. This reinforced the good that boxing did for the country, it pointed to the way in which the sport shaped proper gentlemen and citizens needed to lead and represent the country, and it helped promote unity during a time of increasing tribalism. With this in mind, the following analysis suggests that boxing figured centrally in Nigeria’s progress and development as a nation. Bassey’s victories in 1955 for the British Empire Championship and in 1957 for the World Championship mirrored the growing perception that the nation was ready for independence and had achieved equality on the world’s stage in terms of manliness, sport, and Muscular Citizenship.

**Bassey, the Empire Championship, and Nigeria in 1955**

Bassey’s victory for the British Empire Title captured the attention and the imagination of the entire colony, showing those inside and outside Nigeria what Nigerians could accomplish. In the same year, Governor Sir John MacPherson, a man heralded for encouraging the growth of a sporting atmosphere in Nigeria, was replaced in office by Sir James Robertson, “the Lord Mountbatten” of Nigeria, who oversaw the decolonization of Nigeria. Also in 1955, the front page of local newspapers provided a continuous stream of details about the grisly murder of the beloved singer Israel

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7 J.S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, 373. Robertson was stationed in the Sudan before coming to Nigeria and was seen by many “as an administrator of terminal arrangements,” or in other words, he oversaw the transition from colony to independence.
Njemanze and the subsequent murder trial that lasted nearly 10 months. Significantly, the Queen of England, Elizabeth II, announced that she was coming in 1956 to tour the country, a proclamation that signaled an important opportunity for Nigerians to showcase the nation’s readiness for internal self-government. Finally, Bassey’s achievement occurred around the same time of the year as the call for, and eventual suppression of, the Lyttleton Constitution, a move that paved the way for internal self-government in 1957. Considered together, 1955 was clearly a year worth remembering in Nigeria, but the triumph of Hogan ‘Kid’ Bassey over Irishman Billy ‘Spider’ Kelly for the British Empire Championship in November of that year has made its mark on historical memory. This aspect is routinely overlooked in historical analysis of the late colonial era. As established in Chapter 7, 1953 represented a pivotal moment for boxing in Nigeria, with Bassey’s victory in 1955 at the British Empire Featherweight Championship served to validate the role of boxing as a shaper of men, a tool by which to mold the contours of an ideal gentleman, and as a means for placing Nigeria on the map of the sporting and political world.

Newspapers helped to build anticipation for the British Empire Featherweight title fight against Billy ‘Spider’ Kelly in 1955 by providing details about Hogan Bassey’s life, thereby transforming him into a model for youth and a symbol for the nation. He became

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8 This murder trial was front page news for most of 1955. Njemanze was a famous local singer who blended several forms of music and was known throughout Lagos. His murder at the hands of his bandmates, the dumping of his body near the railroad tracks, the investigation, all made for tantalizing news. His trial even became a chapbook in Onitsha.


10 The notable exception to this is Anene Ejikeme’s work on Bassey. Anene Ejikeme, “Hogan Bassey: Nigerian Icon”
a regular fixture on the front page of several of the daily newspapers in Lagos, and he was a habitual topic in the “letters to the editor” sections. Good luck messages, like this one from Oyebalo Jolaoso, were typical: “his victory will not only bring honour and glory to our nation but inspiration to our athletes . . .”

Many recognized that the outcome of the fight had important significance for domestic pride and international recognition. For the first time, a Nigerian stood on the precipice of winning Empire-wide respect. As historian Brian Stoddart notes about colonial international sporting competitions, “An important contributing factor here was the role of the sports hero in the raising of both expectations and aspirations as well as in providing a colonial role model.” In the 1950s, this role model was “the measurement of social progress…comparing colonial against British achievements in sport” where a “colonial victory…might be interpreted as symbolic of general parity” with the British.

In the western world, boxing had for many years served as a national emblem for which the victory of boxers represented the greatness of the nation.

In the same way, Bassey came to symbolize Nigeria’s parity with other nations, and his victories endorsed the country’s calls for more political autonomy.

**British Empire Champion**

In November of 1955, Bassey fought Kelly in Belfast, and since Kelly was an Irishman, he had a home crowd advantage as well as an Irish referee, prompting many

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Figure 8-1. Picture of Billy “Spider” Kelly. Kelly lost the British Empire Featherweight Title to Hogan Kid Bassey in 1955. *NDT* 11 May 1957. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.

Figure 8-2. Front Page of *NDT* on the morning of Bassey’s fight for the Empire Championship. *NDT* 19 November 1955. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.
Nigerians to wonder if Bassey would receive a fair match. Bassey had other concerns as well. Kelly had previously defeated Bassey in London in 1953 on a points decision. Moreover, Kelly won the British Empire Featherweight Title when he defeated fellow West African Roy Ankrah of Ghana (then Gold Coast) in 1954. Bassey had to be the best in order to beat Kelly, something many believed could not happen.

Despite having the advantage on a number of different levels, Kelly made a fateful mistake. He dominated the fight early, and in the sixth round he opened a gash over Bassey’s left eye. Sensing that victory was near, Kelly went on the offensive, but in the eighth round Bassey dodged an attack and delivered a vicious right hook, knocking

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14 For example, see, “Be Cautious: Blackie Power Advises Hogan Bassey” *NDT* October 30, 1955. Articles like these were common leading up to the fight, worried over Bassey’s chances for a fair fight, or that he might lose to a superior opponent.

Kelly out.\textsuperscript{16} Kelly’s head smacked the canvas, he was counted out by the referee, and the Irish boxer stared up at the lights for a full four minutes before regaining consciousness.\textsuperscript{17} According to some reports, officials feared that Kelly lay dying in the ring, and they called a priest out from the audience to administer his Last Rites.\textsuperscript{18} Eventually, Kelly regained consciousness, but the ferociousness of the knockout was proof of the Nigerian boxer’s punching power, and it was linked to the strength of the up and coming nation.\textsuperscript{19}

For weeks after the fight, the comments sections of several Lagosian papers were filled with letters about the outcome of the fight and what it meant for Nigeria. As one commenter wrote, “Hogan (Kid) Bassey’s boxing victory was a national one for with that terrific punch…he has put Nigeria on the boxing map of the world…It is only Natural that his victory should be hailed in all parts of the country with great joy.”\textsuperscript{20} Another read, “[Bassey] has greatly raised the standard and brightened the horizon of Nigerian Sportsmanship and what is more, he has put our fast growing country of Nigeria on the world map in this era of keen competition.”\textsuperscript{21} Another reader wrote in, stating, “Bassey has courageously boxed his way to singular fame and has admirably placed our dearly


\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. This newspaper reports says it was two minutes. Regardless, he was knockout and worries over Bassey’s safety ensued.

\textsuperscript{18} Interview with Adelyinka Makinde, London, England, May 2013. Also, Jim Jenkinson and Gary Shaw, \textit{The Mersey Fighters}, (Preston: Milo Books, Ltd., 2004), 12. Peter Banasko, Bassey’s manager, recalled praying on his knees in the ring hoping for Kelly to wake up. He thought they would not make it out of the arena alive if anything happened to Kelly in front of his fans.

\textsuperscript{19} “Nigeria’s Empire Champion” \textit{West Africa}, November 26, 1955.

\textsuperscript{20} “Bassey’s Victory” \textit{DS} Nov 22, 1955.

beloved fatherland, Nigeria, on the world map.” Reflecting the importance of Bassey’s victory, many felt that he had “brought honour and respect to Nigeria, [as] he knocked-out Spider Kelly.” Significantly, all of these reports describe the importance of the victory in terms of worldwide recognition of Nigeria and how Bassey has “raised the standard” of the up and coming nation. In other words, Bassey’s win had proven the progress of the country.

Figure 8-4. Picture of Bassey receiving his Empire Championship trophy. Presented to Bassey by none other than Douglas J. Collister, the first Nigerian Boxing Board of Control Chairman, and the then-Nigerian Steward on the British Empire Boxing Board of Control. DS 21 Nov 1955. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.

After winning the British Empire Title, Bassey cemented his place as a national hero. The newspapers showed photographs of him with his new trophy, as well as in the ring standing over the former white Empire champion, displaying his ascension and power to all. Bassey was “lionised” in both the UK and in Nigeria. Horatio Agedah

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reported that, “Never before had all Nigeria awakened to the desired course of a sporting event; never before did a boxing match claim the interest and attention of so many people including even those whose general knowledge of the fight game does not go beyond the sight of two pugnacious children in the street corner or perhaps a personal experience in a most unwelcome brawl.”

The Bassey name, according to Agedah, “is a household word in all Nigeria, almost synonymous with ‘boxing,’” and he was praised for his desired qualities, including, “patience, endurance, courage and dogged perseverance.”

Even more, the fight of 1955 served to unify a nation that experienced division on multiple levels. Chief H.O. Davies described listening to the radio broadcast of the Bassey fight, and how surrounding his radio were Westerners, Easterners, and expatriates cheering for Bassey. Once the announcement aired that Kelly was counted out, “Everybody jumped up and we yelled – white and black, East and West and embraced each other.” For a brief moment, the fight and Bassey himself united a people normally divided politically, ethnically, and racially to the point of embrace. In fact, “The victory of Hogan Bassey was received with noisome glee in Nigeria, and in different ways and various measures people of all classes marked the occasion with festive gatherings.” Reflecting a clear identification with Bassey, his win sparked


25 Ibid.

26 “Well Done, Bassey” NDT Nov 21, 1955. Chief H.O. Davies was one of the first European-educated Lagosian lawyers. He was instrumental in the creation of the Nigerian Youth Movement and later as a member of the NCNC. “Calculations of Mr. Davies” West Africa, May 20, 1950, 437.


celebrations on par with those held on “Christmas or New Year.” People celebrated and partied early into the morning, dancing in the streets at the fact that Nigeria had a world champion, forgetting for a moment the divisions in Nigerian society. Throughout the 1950s, Bassey’s victories brought Nigerians together in a way that eluded, and continues to elude, the best efforts of politicians.

Even as people debated the appropriateness of boxing in 1953, Bassey represented a beacon towards which Nigerian sportsmen pointed when discussing the good qualities of the sport and the ascension of Nigeria in the international arena. That year, as Nigerians discussed the possible recipient of the “Sportsman of the Year Award” given annually to the athlete who had done the most for Nigerian sport during the previous year, a debate ensued in the newspaper about whether Hogan Bassey or the local football star, Teslimi “Thunder” Balogun, was most deserving. Supporting Bassey, Horatio Agedah of the NDT argued that while “Thunder” Balogun was indeed a great football player, he had not “elevated our national prestige” or displayed the qualities of a sportsman, and popularity alone should not be the reason that he be sportsman of the year. Instead, Agedah pointed to a different, up-and-coming athlete:

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30 Horatio Agedah, "Popularity Alone Does not Make the Best Sportsman" NDT Nov 16, 1953. Balogun was one of the first football stars of the colony and one of the first to be recruited by an English club team, eventually working his way up to play for the Queen’s Park Rangers. Balogun was admired for his skill with the ball and his powerful shot. Today, he is remembered in Lagos (and the country) through a stadium in Surulere suburb of Lagos named after him.

31 Ibid. Agedah was a famous sports reporter in Lagos and wrote several commentary articles, including those that defended boxing in 1953 after the death of Homicide Ilori, as mentioned in Chapter 7. For more details on Agedah, see Chapter 7. Agedah based his assertions off the football teams’ embarrassing loss to the Gold Coast 7-0 and the controversy that surrounded that affair. For more information on the history of football in Nigeria, or the 1953 Gold Coast controversy, see Wiebe Boer, “Nation Building Exercise: Sporting Culture and the Rise of Football in Colonial Nigeria.” (Unpublished dissertation, Yale University, 2003).
I will tell you where to look for these rare qualities of good sportsmanship. Take a flight with me to Liverpool and straight we go to the stables of Boxing Manager Peter Banasko. There, shooting short, crisp punches at a rattle ball or engaged in a body-building exercise, you find a young man, barely twenty-one years of age, short and thick set, coming forward to greet you, with a modest smile and a humble 'how do you do, sir?' That is Nigeria’s greatest sportsman of the year 1953 - Hogan (Kid) Bassey.32

From Agedah’s perspective, Balogun could not be the best sportsman because he was not a gentleman outside the pitch, nor was he humble, always thinking about how his behavior reflected on his country and fellow citizens. Bassey stood in contrast to this, as he recognized the importance of displaying characteristics beyond mere athletic ability. As he said, “I am not fighting for myself but to place Nigeria on the world map.”33 For Agedah, it was not the popularity of the athlete that mattered--and Balogun was certainly popular--but rather the qualities of a sportsman, the gentlemanly demeanor, and the prestige that the athlete brought to bear on Nigeria internationally.

Figure 8-5. Picture of Horatio Agedah, also known to Lagosians at “TKO”. NDT January 1, 1955. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
Agedah was not the only person to present Bassey as an ideal representative for the nation based on the boxer’s conduct inside and outside of the ring. Leading up to Bassey’s fight against “Spider” Kelly for the British Empire Featherweight Championship in 1955, figures such as Jack Farnsworth, Secretary of the NBBC, and Sir Stuart MacPherson, the Governor-General, heralded him as a true gentleman, a Nigerian and Liverpudlian hero, and the best ambassador for Nigeria. Farnsworth wrote in the NDT before the fight, stating:

I can think of no one in the intervening purity and who has so consistently brought credit to Nigeria in the world of sport. One might say almost, in any sphere of activities...In addition to his general demeanor, both in and out of the ring, the sporting manner in which he has both won and lost fights and by sheer character he has endeared himself to the boxing public wherever he has appeared.

Bassey’s defeat of Kelly further elevated his own status as a role model and rejuvenated the boxing scene in Nigeria, and especially Lagos, reinforcing its potential as a tool by which to further the nation domestically and internationally. The 1955 match for the British Empire Featherweight Championship clearly galvanized and united Nigerians, while simultaneously showcasing the potential and realized merit of the nation to the world during the beginnings of the independence movement. In this manner, Bassey’s pivotal victory cemented his legacy as a Nigerian hero and “placed

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34 "It’s very best Wished to you Hogan!" NDT Nov 13, 1955. The Governor-General, Sir Stuart MacPherson had sent a letter to Bassey indicating his pride in Bassey, and how great an ambassador he was for the country because of his gentlemanly demeanor inside and outside the ring.

35 Ibid.

36 Ejikeme, Hogan Bassey. Also see “Salami Meets Crapper for the Featherweight Crown” NDT Nov 27, 1955; “Well Done, Bassey” NDT Nov 21, 1955. Also see Chapter Seven for the arguments to keep boxing going in 1953 after the deaths of three boxers.
[Nigeria] on the world map."\(^{37}\) As the Oba of Lagos, Adele II, wrote in his “Best Wishes” for Bassey, “In every aspect of life, education, politics, economic, Nigeria is forging ahead…Today I know Nigerians all over the world are looking forward with anxiety to Hogan Bassey to place Nigeria still on a higher plane in the boxing world than any Nigerian has ever done.”\(^{38}\) Winning on the world’s stage thus vindicated Nigerian aspirations for international recognition and self-government.

Although the fight represented and encouraged political optimism for the nation’s future, newspaper reports and interviews indicate that Bassey himself also became a man worthy of emulation because of his high character inside the ring and his gentlemanliness outside of it.\(^{39}\) In fact, Bassey’s youthfulness, as he was not yet 24 years old at the time of the fight, encouraged many to see boxing as a way by which to mold boys into the upright, moral men needed to lead the country. As one report claimed, “Indeed, Bassey had displayed to the British public that quality that is characteristic of the African race – the ability to withstand hardship.”\(^{40}\) Many boxers were described as able to withstand punishment, a sign of their strength and determination, laudable qualities in Nigerian men, as described in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Bassey’s well-publicized victory, and his status as a nation hero, linked the desired traits of a gentleman and the strength and virility of the nation to the perceived

\(^{37}\) Several letters to the editor and articles claimed Bassey had placed Nigeria on the world map. For example, see “Bassey’s Victory” \textit{DS} Nov 22, 1955.

\(^{38}\) Oba Adele, “Good Luck to you” \textit{NDT} Nov 13, 1955.

\(^{39}\) Interviews with the Professor, Adeniji Adele, Olu Moses, Abraham Adeyemi Jones, Jerry Okorodudu, Ade Makinde. May-July 2012 2013.

\(^{40}\) “Tribute to Hogan Bassey” \textit{DS} Nov 30, 1955.
“civilized” aspects of boxing.\textsuperscript{41} This connection was not uncommon, as several colonies in the British Empire used boxing in the 1950s for such a cultural purpose.\textsuperscript{42} In the case of Nigeria, however, the black boxer became both the symbol of the nation and the success of the race at large.\textsuperscript{43} Presenting Nigeria as a nation on par with England and other established countries was difficult not only because of Nigeria’s political infancy, but also because of perceptions of race. A champion was needed to model both the excellence of the state and of the race of its people.\textsuperscript{44}

According to Anene Ejikeme, Bassey had two qualities that made him an ideal national hero: Bassey himself was not from one of the three major ethnic groups, and he was also a well-traveled and worldly figure that claimed many identities, both of which made rallying around him easier.\textsuperscript{45} Bassey was an Efik man, and since he was not Igbo, Yoruba, nor Hausa/Fulani, he was able to transcend the established ethnic divide in Nigeria that had stifled political aspirations for the nation. Bassey being from an ethnic minority meant that no one single ethnic group could claim him during this time period.\textsuperscript{46} These characteristics, however, cannot stand as the only reason for his popularity, fame, and hero status in Nigeria. They facilitated his ascendance, but it was the sport of boxing and the fact that his participation in the 1955 fight for the British

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{41} Anene Ejikeme, “Hogan Bassey: Nigerian Icon”
\textsuperscript{42} Roy Ankrah and London Kid and his role on the Gold Coast, Ivor Germaine of Trinidad, Joe Bygraves of Jamaica, all of whom were in England and several in Liverpool with Bassey.
\textsuperscript{43} See Hietala, \textit{Fight of the Century}, 1-11.
\textsuperscript{44} Hietala, \textit{Fight of the Century}, 6-8.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\end{footnotesize}
Empire Featherweight occurred at such a politically crucial moment that propelled his ethnicity into the spotlight. As Tyler Fleming argues, Africans had long followed boxing and “boxing has been a significant part of black social life since the dawn of the twentieth century.” Bassey was part of a larger process of what Emmanuel Akyeampong described as the “Pan-African [boxing] agenda in the twentieth century.”

Although being a minority did indeed help this process of attaining national stardom, one cannot forget that a similar process happened in Nigeria in 1962. As I argue elsewhere, Igbo boxer Dick Tiger (Richard Ihetu) also won a world title for Nigeria at the middleweight division. Similar to Bassey, Tiger was lauded as a national hero and a gentleman despite his Igbo background and the intense regionalism in the early independence period. With this in mind, it seems that Bassey’s ethnicity did not matter as much as was previously believed. Instead, it was Bassey’s perceived qualities as a gentleman, boxer, and international leader that elevated him as a national hero.

The political significance of Bassey and his victory in the ring was not lost on contemporary politicians. Dr. Chike Obi, secretary general of the Dynamic Party, said, “Hogan has definitely contributed his own (indeed more than his own) share in our struggle for political, economic, cultural, and spiritual freedoms. We politicians, who are fighting for all, are striving to contribute our own share and by God’s power we will soon succeed like Hogan and place Nigeria as a united and unified great country on the

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49 See Michael Gennaro, “The Whole Place is in Pandemonium.” Also see Adeyinka Makinde’s biography of Dick Tiger, *Dick Tiger: The Life and Times of a Boxing Immortal.*
In connection with the goal of a unified country, something all Nigerian politicians at the time aspired towards, Bassey was proof that it was possible to unite a politically diverse and divided people through a common identity as Nigerians. As Jan Dunzendorfer has shown in his focus on Ghana, the development of the local boxing scene “meant becoming part of an international community.” Each Bassey victory further validated the sport’s benefit for Nigeria and its people. Moreover, his achievements sent shockwaves through the nation, serving to develop amateur boxing, update the definition of manliness, and strengthen the connection between boxing and the vitality of the nation.

Aftermath of British Empire Victory

Bassey’s victory in the 1955 British Empire Featherweight Championship facilitated three specific changes regarding boxing and its connection to perceptions of proper citizens and the place of Nigeria on the world stage. First, amateur boxing gained newfound encouragement and validation as a site for the training of Muscular Citizens. Second, many began to see boxing, as well as boxers themselves, as loci of idealized masculine traits, including courage, sportsmanship, and gentlemanliness. Finally, these developments concerning boxing were articulated through

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50 “Well Done, Bassey” NDT Nov 21, 1955. Dr. Obi was a mathematician and lecturer at the University of Ibadan and later the creator of the Dynamic Party in 1951. The party believed in Kemalism for emergent African nations and rejected the 1953 call for “Self-Government in 1956” detailed in Chapter Seven. He later became the secretary of the NCNC delegations to the London Conferences in 1957 and 1958. He became the House of Representatives member for Onitsha Urban, Nnamdi Azikiwe’s old seat, when Azikiwe became President of the Senate in 1960, as a member of the NCNC. He was expelled from the party in 1961 for criticisms of the party and leaders, and later tried for sedition by the federal government when printing and handing out pamphlets, but later acquitted. For more information, see Richard L. Sklar Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation, 406-408.

While Bassey’s British Empire title win in 1955 promoted the three changes, these trends would continue to evolve through 1957 when Bassey won the World Featherweight Title, the fight described at the beginning of this chapter. Over the span of a few years, people would increasingly associated boxing with the vitality of the nation in a positive way, use it as a testament to, and example for, concepts of proper manhood, and offer it as evidence for the nation’s preparedness for internal self-government and independence.

Bassey’s victory acted as a tipping point for the perception of boxing. Whereas many perceived its benefits as questionable at best and “savage” at worst in 1953, in the years following 1955, it was considered to be of great value for making gentlemen and citizens in the colony. The Lagosian amateur boxing circuit experienced an immediate boost in support and acceptance. A new generation of amateur boxers bred primarily in the Boys’ Clubs and boxing clubs during the early 1950s (see Chapter 5) made the jump to professional boxing in 1955, highlighting the possibility for young boxers to grow into professional and able-bodied men. When Bassey became the first Nigerian to win an Empire Championship in 1955, he fired up the imaginations of boys and young men across the country, who in turn flocked to Boys’ Clubs and Boxing Clubs with the hope of replicating his success. It also influenced former boxers such

\[52\] For a detailed look at Muscular Citizenship, see Chapter 4.

\[53\] For more information on the Boys’ Club Movement in Nigeria, see Chapter 5.

\[54\] Interview with the “Professor,” Ibadan, Nigeria, June 2013.
as former professional boxer Lawson Moon, who came out of retirement to try his hand at boxing once more in the squared circle.\(^{55}\)

This growing interest and the success that Bassey modeled justified further support of the sport on both a local and national level through the support for Boys’ Clubs sporting activities.\(^{56}\) Although the Nigerian Amateur Boxing Association (NABA) had been present in Nigeria since 1951, it was not until 1955 that the first fruits of the amateur class began to ripen and make the move into the professional ranks. By early 1955, several big name amateur champions, including Howard Jones and Rafiu King, turned professional in order to make money and acquire fame in the same manner as Bassey.\(^{57}\) In 1955 the NABA, under the chairmanship of Jack Farnsworth, decided to expand the amateur circuit outwards to the provinces so that the good ideals and traits of amateur boxing would be available to more Nigerians.\(^{58}\) Farnsworth sent former boxer Dick Turpin (real name D.T. Uchegbue, an ex-flyweight champion of Nigeria) to tour the provinces like Warri, Sapele, Kaduna, and the Mid-West and find suitable and promising boxers around which to construct clubs.\(^{59}\) These clubs would in turn provide Lagos and Nigeria with a steady supply of boxers from which to choose for international competitions like the Olympics and Empire Games, events that offered opportunities to

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\(^{55}\) “I changed my Mind About Retiring” \textit{NDT} Nov 29, 1955. The squared circle was a nickname given to the boxing ring. Although a ring is circular, the boxing ring is in the shape of a square, so it has been aptly called the squared circle.

\(^{56}\) As mentioned in Chapter 5, the Boys’ Club movement was instrumental in the proliferation of boxing during the early 1950s among the youth of Lagos, and later the colony.

\(^{57}\) “Howard Decides to Turn Professional” \textit{NDT} 3 Jan 1955: “Howard said his aim of going to the professional class was to seek new excitement in the fight game.”

\(^{58}\) “NABA Asks Turpin to Lay Foundation” \textit{NDT} Jan. 5, 1955.

\(^{59}\) Ibid.
showcase Nigeria. As Horatio Agedah argued in 1955, Nigeria should focus its efforts on popular sports like boxing rather than new sports like rugby and basketball because “Every nation has its favourite sports; the sports which claim the largest number of followers and in which that country can be justly proud of her achievements.” The country should continue with sports like boxing and football and perfect them in order to instill in its people an “undying enthusiasm characteristic of true sportsmen.”

Like Agedah, many people began to encourage the sport of boxing within society as a way to cultivate citizenship and gentlemanliness. As reported in the NDT, “The Welfare Department has long realized the value of boxing in the character training and the physical training of boys. Hence the number of boxing clubs it has helped bring to birth here in Lagos, and in the provinces in places like Ibadan, Port Harcourt, and Calabar.” Newspaper reports suggest that amateur boxing was key to making men out of troubled and misguided urban youths, as discussed in Chapter 5. The success of students of programs such as the Boy’s Clubs at the amateur scene by 1955 was proof of such development and the effectiveness of boxing training. The proliferation of boxing clubs and boxing in Boys’ Clubs, in conjunction with a supposed decrease in crime, bore out this fact. Supporting the amateur boxing scene was one way that enlightened elite Nigerians could support the future generation, or at least make sure that its

60 Horatio Agedah, “New Sports are not wanted” NDT Sept 4, 1955. “A public poll to determine the most popular in Nigeria” would find soccer as the most – because it is the oldest and most accessible. Behind soccer “comes athletics, boxing, cricket, hockey, lawn and table tennis” in that order. “We are all well aware of the truth that the standard of soccer, the most popular sport in Nigeria, is at present sinking lower and lower into melancholy depths.” Should not replace soccer stadium with basketball and face the current problem of standard with “undying enthusiasm characteristic of true sportsmen.”

61 Ibid.

members were on track to lead the country on its path to independence. As the *NDT* noted, “Those who attend these shows have a good time seeing lively and virile youngsters putting up a game show and at the same time are doing their share in support of the moral and physical training of the coming generation.” Attendance at Boys’ Club amateur boxing grew due to the fact that the sport was “supported wholeheartedly” and drew “huge crowds” who wished to see these young boys and men build “a reputation.” In other words, supporting amateur boxing was a way to support healthy manhood and nationhood.

Beyond character development, boxing was also hailed as a sport accessible to all Nigerians, similar to soccer. More specifically, “Many of the delinquents were non-scholars and so to keep youth busy in their leisure hours the Welfare Department created some clubs into which the youth were drawn.” As the *NDT* reported of amateur boxing and Boys’ Clubs:

There are few sports more calculated to inculcate stamina and the sporting spirit in a youngster than boxing. There is not a fanatical pacifist would deny that every young man should be able to look after himself in a rough house, and how better to do so than by learning the noble art of self-defence? Not every youngster can get hold of a tennis racket or even a [cricket] bat, or join a group that has access to the necessary space to play football. But few boys are so underprivileged as not to be able to lay hands on a

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65 Ibid.
just a pair of knickers. That is all he needs. His boxing club supplies the gloves, the ring and the opponent.\textsuperscript{66}

It is significant that the \textit{NDT} writer describes the usefulness of boxing in inculcating stamina (healthy energy), sporting spirit (sportsmanship), and the ability to take care of oneself physically (toughness/strength), all prerequisites for gentlemanly character.

A variety of other reports reinforce the perception that boxing produced well-balanced men by pointing to the ability of amateur boxers to apply skills learned through the sport to other aspects of their lives in urban Lagos. For example, in January 1955 an announcement that boxer Joe Rufus, real name Raufu Oyenuga, had just finished a five year apprenticeship as a mechanic took up half of the sports page.\textsuperscript{67} In the article, the writer explained that Rufus, known locally as the “Fighting Mechanic,” “was given a certificate which it stated that he is ‘punctual, diligent, and his conduct very satisfactory.’”\textsuperscript{68} He continued, “His master commended his cool temperament and said that it gave him pleasure to mention that Joe never at any time misused his boxing skill."\textsuperscript{69} It was not uncommon to see reports similar to this one that testified to the usefulness of boxing in shaping well-behaved young men who would never dream of becoming violent offenders outside the ring. Such reports often noted how young boxers had been when they began boxing and how they had developed into useful and

\begin{flushright}
\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{66} “Amateur Boxing Tomorrow” \textit{NDT} Jan 16, 1955.
\textsuperscript{67} “Boxer Knocked Out of Apprenticeship” \textit{DS} Jan 17, 1955.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\end{footnotesize}
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disciplined citizens and employed men – proof that sustained boxing in the lives of youth was instrumental in their development into gentlemen. It was heralded as a sign of progress and a boon to boxing that such successful men had started as boxers. For instance, one writer notes that “There is every indication that the glory that was professional boxing’s is to be restored” with the likes of Rufus and other gentlemen. Rufus was not alone, as several weeks later a similar report came out about Sunny Dudu. These examples demonstrated to many that boxing was in fact not a savage sport, as discussed in Chapter 7, but was a great source of discipline for young men, setting them on the right path to success and prosperity as individuals and as part of a collective society of Nigerians.

Figure 8-6. Picture of Joe Rufus. DS April 28, 1955. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.

70 In the case of Rufus, the article notes that he started boxing at the age of 17.


72 “Sunny Dudu Successful” DS June 21, 1955. His real name Emmanuel A. Adeleye, was a finalist for the shorthand examination with a rate of 90 words per minute. He hopes to make it to the UK to study shorthand.
“Manly Children”

As Abosede George argues in her analysis of girls in colonial Lagos, the child in colonial Nigeria was a “vulnerable and imperiled universalist subject” whose very presence in urban centers like Lagos “demanded and legitimized the salvationist colonial regime,” as well as the leadership of elite Nigerian women and men.73 Similar to the concept that young girls needed the protection of the state and proper education to make them into “modern women,” it was believed that young men in post-war Nigeria and especially Lagos needed guidance to become modern men. Part of this discourse centered on the belief that boys were not receiving the proper education in schools, and thus they lacked proper character. More specifically, many asserted that it was necessary to instill sportsmanship, strength, and courage in boys at a young age. As the success of boxers like Bassey became public knowledge, Nigerians came to believe that these characteristics were only accessible through sport, as mentioned in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4. In the case of girls, Nigerians saw the alteration of girlhood as “an indigenous modernization effort that would play a crucial role” in making modern women proper citizens.74 As demonstrated by Jan Dunzendorfer in his examination of Ghana, administrators in other countries also used sport to educate young boys on how to be men.75 Building on the scholarship of George and Dunzendorfer, this section argues that while Western-style education was emphasized as the primary means by which to

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73 Abosede George, Making Modern Girls, 6.
74 Ibid., 7.
socialize Nigerian girls into modern women, there was a growing concern that Nigerian boys required better schooling as well as Boys’ Clubs and sporting clubs to develop into proper men. I argue that sport, and especially boxing, played a crucial role in the 1950s in making young boys into modern men and citizens due to the perpetual fear that Nigerian males lacked strength, character, and ultimately masculinity.

Despite the fact that education had recently become free to all, many Nigerians feared that educational institutions, as well as traditional styles of parenting, were not efficiently teaching children how to be “manly.” 76 One newspaper article dated from 1955 decried the indigenous Nigerian ways of rearing a child in urban cities like Lagos, relying too much on keeping the child a perpetual child until adulthood/marriage. The writer argued that parents should treat their children as adults early on, which will allow them to grow up “in a manly way.” 77 The article specifies that parents, and mothers particularly, placed too much emphasis on coddling and cuddling children. It was better to learn toughness and determination at an early age, because “Cuddling is alright at a certain age, but unless a child is going to become a sissy, cuddling should not be carried too far, as a matter of fact some children, at the tender age of two, resent being cuddled.” 78 The article mentions that English kids sit at the adult table for meals, and they like being treated with respect. In contrast, Nigerians were careful not to allow their children to participate in “the conversations of their elders. But I hope modern parents realise that that time is past. The world is progressing daily, and if we do not wish to be


78 Ibid.
left behind, we must try to go with the tide.” Nigerians therefore need to “go with the tide” of the rest of the world and stop treating children as kids. The country needed manly men, not “sissies,” and if young boys already had tendencies for such or were otherwise troubled, “They [children] can be reformed,” as one newspaper image proclaimed.  

Figure 8-7. Picture of children from Yaba. These children were under the protection of the Nigerian Colony Welfare Office, participating in activities to “reform” them into proper citizens. *DS* May 14 1955. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.

In addition to parenting, bad economic circumstances produced by colonialism, the Great Depression, and the Second World War contributed to a growing population of unemployed, wayward young juvenile delinquents and unattached bachelors, who

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79 Ibid.

80 *DS* May 14, 1955.
were seen as rebellious in the eyes of many Nigerians. This problematic group produced a counterculture comprised of free spending, women chasing, marriage postponement, fashion consciousness, and possibly criminal behavior that defied local custom. Partly to blame, thought colonial officials, was the city and its detribalizing effects on young men, as seen in Chapter 4. Another scapegoat was the lack of schooling, and proper schooling found in the colony to develop manhood.

As independence loomed, these problems appeared increasingly precarious, producing a discourse about masculinity and its relationship to citizenship. As Stephanie Newell observed through her reading of Onitsha market literature, the 1940s-60s period in Nigeria “saw a new class of men” emerge that reflected anxiety about masculine identity, female instability, and modern behavior in the urban city. Many Nigerians argued that young men were not being raised at home or in school correctly, and contemporary newspaper articles revealed signs of an insecure masculinity in the process of having its body re-built and launched as the cultural ideal. Citizenship and

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81 For these circumstances, See Fourchard, "Inventing," and Simon Heap "Jaguda Boys." Also See Waller “Rebellious Youth,” M.A. Sobamowo, "Marriage: a Bachelor's Views" NDT Jan 24, 1947. Sobamowo said that choosing to be a bachelor is important and are the lifeblood of a society for eligible women to marry. His reasons for not marrying are as follows. 1) Not enough money to marry - it is costly to have a wife and kids and they cannot be easily afforded. He spends his money on a car and clothes and liquor because it is cheaper than a wife. He also doesn’t want to rush into marriage and then divorce which is also just as costly. 2) Want to give his wife not just the necessities but the luxuries. why should two people live extremely poor just to satisfy expectations. 3) Hasn’t found anyone worth marrying. Pretty faces is not enough you women have to bring something to the table as well.

82 M.A. Sobamowo, "Marriage: a Bachelor's Views" NDT Jan 24, 1947; and Lisa Lindsay, Working with Gender: Wage Labor and Social Change in Southwestern Nigeria (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003), 8.


84 Ibid.
nationalism were increasingly tied to perceptions of the ideal man, and traits described as necessary for men were also proclaimed as necessary for the nation.

The circumstances that created a crisis of masculinity in Nigeria also played out in the United States, and they motivated a development that Holt and Thompson call the “Pursuit of Heroic Masculinity.” According to these scholars, Heroic Masculinity emerged in the United States as a response to the shortcomings and failures of urban men who had become emasculated by recent and drastic socioeconomic changes. They explain that “We find that American mass culture idealizes the man-of-action hero—an idealized model of manhood that resolves the inherent weaknesses in two other prominent models (the breadwinner and the rebel).” Along with the valorization of heroes like sports stars, Holt and Thompson found that, “From this perspective, the mythologized cowboy…exemplified [these] masculine ideals that appeared to be under threat as middleclass men assumed the mantle of a more domesticated breadwinner: rugged individualism, an adventurous spirit, risk-taking, displays of physical prowess, and most of all, a high degree of personal autonomy.”

Holt and Thompson’s observations about changes in American masculinity provide a useful template with which to better understand the emergence of breadwinner and rebel masculinities that also emerged in Nigeria in response to economic hardship. As Lisa Lindsay has deftly shown, Nigerian men consistently

86 Ibid, 425.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 425-426.
appealed to the European “breadwinner” model to assert their manhood and claim to be modern. As seen in Chapter 5, Nigerian men also took to the mythologized cowboy image, consumed numerous films, created Cowboy Clubs, and boxers even named themselves after cowboys they had seen in Westerns. Furthermore, as Lindsay has noted, the urban environment in 1950s Lagos was gendered towards a more masculine space and physical prowess was idolized. And yet, the development of breadwinner and rebel masculinities did not encompass nor satisfy the inherent weaknesses of male urban colonial masculinity.

Part of Bassey’s appeal was that he encompassed physical strength as well as economic success and gentlemanly behavior, providing another avenue through which masculinity could be expressed in line with the demands and expectations of the postwar African urban locale. Bassey was the most accomplished sporting star the colony had ever seen.

The Welfare Department had already begun the process of correcting the perceived lack of manliness in the postwar generation through sport, which they believed was key to molding children in all aspects, social and otherwise. And, according to Faulkner, the Boys’ Clubs, in which boxing was emphasized, were designed to “inculcate in the boys the spirit of tolerant and common citizenship,” along with leadership, courage, and strength.

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89 Lisa Lindsay, *Working with Gender*, especially Chapter Five.

90 For example, Small Montana, Little Zorro, Texas Kid, Hollywood Texas, Billy the Kid, and Roy Rogers to name a few. Horatio Agheda, “The Nigerian Boxer and His Name” *NDT* Dec 27, 1953.

91 Lisa Lindsay, “Trade Unions and Football Clubs.”

92 “Helping Young Lagos” – *West Africa* Dec 22, 1951, pg 1181.
By 1951 there were over 25 Boys’ Clubs in Lagos and its surrounding areas, with 12 on the main island alone. With boxers like Bassey as their model, participation in these clubs skyrocketed, and the number of these institutions jumped to over 50 in 1955. Boys increasingly took part in the culture of boxing by joining these clubs in rapid numbers, and also by enthusiastically following boxing in the newspapers. In fact, as Peter Marris described in his study of Lagosian families in the early 1960s, many young men recalled their boyhood fascination with boxing and particularly the figure of the boxer. Connected with this interest, young boys often collected the pictures of boxers presented in the local newspapers and stored them in scrapbooks, similar to the hero worship reflected in the collection of baseball cards by young kids in the United States. Pointing to the literal value that boxers gained in society, many kids collected boxing pictures to sell them to other kids and adults in Lagos, with “the really big ones” worth a shilling, allowing the sellers to make as much as 15 shillings per month selling boxers’ photos. In addition to the economic opportunity such photos represented, children also collected them because they wished to emulate the skills and traits of the boxers depicted, in addition to their masculine adult body.

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93 Ibid.
94 NAI COMCOL 248/S.126 – “African Boys Club”
96 Ibid.
98 Marris, Family and Social Change in an African City, 61. Also, interview with Abraham Adeyemi Jones May 2013, Lagos, Nigeria.
Manhood and Muscular Citizenship

As explained above, Nigerians increasingly tied manhood to the strength of the nation, and many believed that education in 1955 was not of the right quality to teach boys the skills necessary to lead the country in the coming years. As the Daily Service noted in 1955, “There are some men today who cannot be called by that name because they lack what it takes to make them that. Men of courage are what Nigeria needs today. A man of accurate and precise decision, able to lead this country to the self-attainment her children so desire.”\(^9\) It is significant that this excerpt claims that only men of a certain character could make Nigeria great and offer the type of leadership needed for self-government and independence. As Modupe noted in her article:

> Good qualities are not born in a man, they are acquired – and not in one day or one year, but in a number of years. That is why character formation in childhood is very important indeed. A coward and one who clings to mother’s apron strings in childhood, will grow up to be no MAN. But it is HE, whose childhood is of strong and forceful character, who is the man and a worthy leader of his people.\(^{10}\)

Thus, part of the reason for boxing’s rise in prominence was its perceived ability to develop character and courage in boys and men. As Leonard Ndubueze Mbah’s work on masculinity in Southern Nigeria shows, young boys were traditionally socialized through indigenous games and wrestling, activities that served to separate “the braves from the cowards” while also showcasing “the physical and symbolic movement of a boy-child from motherly care into the world of men.”\(^{11}\) The skills through which boys

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\(^{10}\) Ibid. Emphasis added

became men, argues Mbah, were “acquired through games.”

Colonialism, however, altered the sports landscape in the urban context, and by 1955, people increasingly saw boxing as the solution for inculcating masculinity. Although Modupe did not explicitly state that boxing was the answer, with the encouragement of Bassey’s victory, boxing was heavily promoted by the Welfare Department, Boys’ Clubs, and schools as part of their curriculum in order to instill ideal masculine traits in young men. In the words of A. Grillo, Chairman of the Oke-Ite Boys’ Club, such sporting activities were designed to not only make them men, but also “To make them happy citizens alive to their civic duty.”

The promotion of boxing as a method by which to save and reform young juvenile delinquents was a common feature in the newspapers, especially reports of the Approved School at Isheri. For example, an article in 1953 links its success in molding potential criminals into “hard-working and peaceful citizens” to boxing through images of boys practicing the sport at school. Sport was an important part of the mission to rehabilitate young troubled boys into valuable male citizens. Over the years, as discussed previously, the qualities of ideal men- character, strength, toughness, and sportsmanship- were consistently attached to boxers portrayed in the newspapers. For

102 Ibid.

103 “Organiser Tells Boys Essence of Youth Movement” DS 30 June 1953.

104 “Successful Experiment at Isheri: Approved School offers chance of rehabilitation to Delinquents” NDT Nov 15 1953. Located 16 miles from Lagos, the Isheri school houses over 180 boys that have been condemned as delinquents. only school for delinquents run by and funded by the government. The school is divided btw juniors (10-14yrs) and seniors (15-18). Much of the training a boy receives is vocational, with only 2 hours a day for reading, writing, and math. The first place he works is in the kitchen to teach hard work. “the length of a boy’s stay on the kitchen depends on his good character. If he is able to overcome the urge to steal and behaves well, then he qualifies for the next stage.” The next stage if 12 months on the farm, which can be extended if he is naughty. After that they choose a trade to be taught. From bricklaying, carpentry, tailoring, farming, painting, and smithery. The time of training then is 3 years before he can go in front of the labour board and apply for a certificate of competency.

105 “Sport and Vocational Therapy at Isheri Approved School” NDT Nov 15, 1953.
example, one newspaper lauded Sunny Dudu for his strong character, stating that “[Dudu] is a stylish, gallant boxer with plenty of vim and fire and he does not seem to understand the meaning of defeat.” His courage in the ring, his ability to take punishment and keep coming, and his never-say-die attitude was a testament to his strength and determination, exactly what a country needed, as indicated by Modupe. In fact, when describing an upcoming fight between Howard Jones and Speedy Twitch, a writer claimed that “One point in Howard’s favour however is that he is a courageous boxer. He seems to have a punishment resisting flesh.” Continuing, the article asserts that “His gallantry may carry him through the full distance of the fight…” As these descriptions show, boxers were indeed courageous and brave, not sissies or cowards. Nigeria did not need cowards.

Figure 8-8. Boxing at the Approved School at Isheri, where condemned juvenile delinquents were sent for rehabilitation. *NDT* November 15, 1953. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.

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106 “Chiko-Dudu bout tonight should be a masterpiece of ring strategy” *DS* May 30 1955.


Figure 8-9. A photo of two young boys boxing in Ebute Metta at a Boys Club function. *NDT* May 14, 1955. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.

Figure 8-10. Picture of Sunny Dudu. *DS* May 30, 1955. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.
“Be a Real Man” – Manhood, Boxing, and Bodies in Lagos’ Print Culture

Contemporary advertisements printed in Nigerian newspapers reflect the impact of Bassey’s victory at the 1955 Empire Championship on society, becoming more focused on masculine strength, power, and muscles. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, the connection between masculinity and sport and muscular bodies gained more significance throughout the 1950s in the Nigerian psyche. This supports Lisa Lindsay’s argument that the Nigerian public sphere became male-dominated in the 1950s, giving way to important networks of patronage through which the standards of masculinity were debated. Concomitant with that development was the exponential growth of sport and particularly boxing. Examined together, the increasing prominence of boxing and the ongoing discourse about the ideal male influenced advertisements and rhetoric in the media, which in turn emphasized a muscular male body as it was exemplified on the fields, arenas, courts, and boxing rings in the colony. In other words, contemporary advertisements evidence the growing connection between boxing and ideas about masculinity because they make corporeal the incorporeal. As Anne Kelk Mager argues in her analysis of beer advertisements in South Africa, which often used sports images to sell a product, “Advertising then provides a structure through which goods and consumers become interchangeable, so that in place of the product - beer - it encourages the consumption of signs such as success, status or powerful male physicality.” Furthermore, Mager contends that “All brands” in the 1950s and early 1960s, “were defined in terms of a powerful physical masculinity and measured on a

109 Lisa Lindsay, “Trade Unions and Football Clubs,” 107. Also See Lindsay, “Domesticity and Difference.”

continuum of alcohol content and rugged masculinity,” thereby linking sporting prowess, alcohol, consumption, and manliness together.\footnote{Ibid, 170.} Sellers realized that they could link consumer goods to Bassey and boxing in order to play to peoples’ desire for “success, status or powerful male physicality.”

Advertisements continued to display the themes outlined in Chapter 3, where strength and energy, two things ever in demand by Nigerians (or at least the things the British believed were lacking in Nigerians) were advertised in the form of muscular sporting bodies. By the mid-1950s, these ads focused on showing the muscular strength and sporting performance that their products could provide. Moreover, they linked these benefits to the health of the individual as well as the success of the nation. As Figure 8-12 shows, the ads directed at colonial white males indicated that a strong and sporting body was not only healthy but also desirable and necessary for success when administering in the colonies.\footnote{Advertisement for Andrews Liver Salts featuring a white, muscular, fit boxer. \textit{NDT} 3 October, 1936.} By the 1950s, this idealization had expanded to urban Nigerian males, evidenced through the practice of collecting boxing photos, as noted above.\footnote{Interview with Abraham Adeyemi Jones, Lagos, Nigeria, May 2012. Also see Marris, \textit{Family and Social Change in an African City}, 61.} For example, a Phosferine ad in the mid-late 1950s shows a Nigerian male with large muscles and a confident expression, an implied consequence of his taking Phosferine. The idealization of these traits are reinforced by two women depicted in the lower part of the image, who are clearly admiring his physique. This

\footnote{Ibid, 170.}

\footnote{Advertisement for Andrews Liver Salts featuring a white, muscular, fit boxer. \textit{NDT} 3 October, 1936.}

\footnote{Interview with Abraham Adeyemi Jones, Lagos, Nigeria, May 2012. Also see Marris, \textit{Family and Social Change in an African City}, 61.}
advertisement suggests that the attainment of a strong and muscular body will project strength and elicit desire in women.\textsuperscript{114}

Figure 8-11. Ad for Atwood Jaundice Bitters. Notice the appeal to strength and ability, and how physically strong a man could be. \textit{NDT} May 2, 1957. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.

Figure 8-12. Advertisement for Andrews Liver Salts. Featuring a white, muscular, fit boxer. He is being watched by an out-of-shape colonial administrator. \textit{NDT} October 3, 1936. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.

\textsuperscript{114} Advertisement for Phosperine, a health tonic that promoted strength and energy. \textit{NDT} May 31, 1957.
Figure 8-13. Advertisement for Phosperine, a health tonic that promoted strength and energy. Such ads were prominent in the 1950s, and as the decade went on became more focused on the muscular body and sporting performance to sell products. *NDT* May 31, 1957. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.

Figure 8-14. Ad for Brooke Bond Tea. Ads like these highlight the intersection between health, sport, and strength/energy that dominated many of the ads in Nigerian newspapers in the 1950s. *NDT* May 2, 1957. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.
Figure 8-15. Ad for Bovril. *NDT* May 24, 1957. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.

Figure 8-16. Ad for Brooke Bond Tea on the same day as the Bassey-Hamia fight. *NDT* June 24, 1957. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.

Figure 8-17. Krushen Salts Ad. Featuring a boxer winning because he used their product for strength, stamina, and power. Such ads featuring sport, but not real people, were commonly used by companies in Africa. *WAP* February 1, 1957. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.
Bassey and other contemporary boxers maintained a prominent presence in sports reports and the newspapers in general in the mid-1950s. Like Phosferine Man in the ad above, boxers were routinely pictured in newspapers punching and shirtless, exposing and displaying muscular bodies that were both idolized and desired by the general public. In fact, several former boxers recalled that, as kids during the 1940s and 50s, they collected the picture of their favorite boxers and wanted to emulate not only their fighting style but also their physiques. Bassey, his fame elevated due to his Empire Title victory in 1955, quickly became part of such advertisements, representing products ranging from aspirin to bikes, all the while displaying his fitness, muscles, strength, and power. For example, in an ad for Aspro, an aspirin company, Bassey

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115 Marris, *Family and Social Change in an African City*, 61.
appears in a boxing stance, his body on display as proof of the strength the product offered.

These advertisements also used boxers to connect the evolving concept of the gentleman to the ideal of raw strength. Ads featuring Bassey, like one for Gillette razors in Figure 8-20 below, frequently depicted him in a fighting stance, as well as in a “gentlemanly” suit and tie. In doing so, these images showcased the composite masculine ideal or the “modern man,” who was imagined to be a gentleman outside the ring and a champion composed of power, strength, and muscles inside of it. The Gillette ad indicated that this “modern man” was clean shaven, well respected, and physically fit. Similarly, in an ad for BSA bicycles, Bassey is portrayed in boxing attire in the ring, as well as in civilian clothing riding the bike. In the image, Bassey rides his bike alongside another professionally-dressed Nigerian male, whose inclusion links Bassey’s gentlemanliness inside and outside the ring to the common Nigerian man, making his characteristics appear more achievable. The strength of the character as well as the body are linked to the boxer and the bicycle, highlighting the convergence of ideals, namely strength, sportsmanship, gentlemanliness, and character.


Figure 8-21. Another BSA Bicycle Advertisement featuring Hogan Bassey. *NDT* March 24, 1956. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.
Nationalism, Bassey, and the Problem of Unity

In addition to influencing ideals of masculinity, Bassey became a symbol of national identity and his Empire Championship victory in 1955 had a lasting impact on concepts of nationalism. As William Baker argues, African leaders had to construct the nation and the “mythology of nationhood…out of nothing,” noting that sport was one institution that Africans could rally around in order to do so. African nations, unlike their European and American counterparts, did not have the monumental institutions, such as national churches, on which to base national identity. Instead, national heroes came to play this role. In his analysis on Sports in Africa, Baker demonstrates that politicians were the first heroes, but athletes later served this purpose since political heroes could not galvanize the nation fully: “Even more than political heroes, athletes represented a kind of success that was ostensibly within reach of vast numbers of young Africans.” The sportsman was thus “Elevated as the incarnation of the new nation's values and aspirations, [and] the hero legitimized the nation.” This line of thinking is further supported by Wallerstein, who contends that “the hero bridges the gap to the modern state. The citizen can feel an affection for the hero which they may

116 Anene Ejikeme “Hogan Bassey: Nigerian Icon”


118 Ibid, 273.

119 Ibid.

120 Ibid.
not have at first for the nation.”\textsuperscript{121} For colonies in search of a national identity, the sportsman provided a national symbol during a time when few existed, and they provided the means by which the population, fractured along political and/or ethnic lines, could express allegiance to the state.

Bassey’s victories in 1955 and 1957 were particularly important because they touted the prestige and dignity of the nation on the international stage. International sport was important for emerging African nations because it “provided instant international recognition for new African nations, serving as an informal, unofficial, but highly visible corollary to the transnational activities of official diplomats and formal negotiations.”\textsuperscript{122} Yet, argues Baker, the political meaning of international sport to Africans depends on the social context of the African nation itself and how the people internalize said sport.\textsuperscript{123} In other words, the sport itself must hold social meaning for the nation and its citizens to have an impact and hold value. Within the Nigerian context, Bassey’s international victories were socially valuable because boxing was already an established sport, for better or for worst, and it confirmed existing ideas that it could be used to create good, gentlemanly citizens.

Bassey’s victory in 1955 appeared to boost the renown of the nation on the international scene, and as a result, it sent a wave of national pride across the country and, in turn, inspired politicians and civilians of the possibility for independence. His


\textsuperscript{122} Baker, "Political Games," 277. Also see Timothy Shaw and Susan Shaw, "Sport as Transnational Politics: A Preliminary Analysis of Africa," found in Benjamin Lowe, et al. \textit{Sport in International Relations} (Champaign: Stripes, 1978), 386-99.

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 277.
ascension occurred at the same time that Nigerian politicians were moving away from a unified central government to a more regionally and ethnic-based government structure. In fact, it seems that the colony’s preparation for a review of the Lyttleton Constitution in 1956 (an event that actually took place in 1957) exasperated ongoing problems similarly to the events in 1953.\textsuperscript{124} The growing distrust in national politics was articulated in the newspapers as their coverage became more partisan throughout the 1950s, reflecting the entrenched regionalism and ethnic pride/loathing in Nigerians, as discussed in Chapter 7. In the Lagosian paper, the \textit{WAP}, whose readership was primarily Igbo, writers complained about the Action Group, a Western Nigeria political party catering mostly to Yorubas. The story published in February 1957 under the headline “AG [Action Group] Hates Ibos” claimed that “Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the leader of the party, has gone to the Eastern Region to lull the people into a false sense of security so that his party’s selfish ambition may be achieved.”\textsuperscript{125} Such articles further divided Lagosians along party and ethnic lines.\textsuperscript{126}

![AG Hates Ibos](image-url)

\textbf{Figure 8-22. “AG Hates Ibos” an example of ethnic political writing frequently found in Nigerian newspapers throughout the 1950s. \textit{WAP} February 4, 1957. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{124} See Chapter 7.
\item \textsuperscript{125} “AG Hates Ibos” \textit{WAP} February 4, 1957.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Ghana, formerly Gold Coast, received its independence in March 1957, and was a sore spot for many Nigerians who felt that their colony should have been on par with Ghana. It was further proof of their inability to unify which many saw as the only hindrance for Nigeria.
\end{itemize}
The “tribalism menace” was a constant feature in the newspapers, and many realized that this issue would make national unity more difficult. The growth of tribal and ethnic associations that focused on local, town, village, and language groups and their self-interests was a primary contributor to problem. Other scholars have noted how these groups played a role in the divisiveness of Nigeria through independence and the role it had on the coming Civil War in the late 1960s.\(^{127}\) By the time MacPherson’s Constitution came into practice in 1951, Nigeria was “congealing” into three separate regional zones: “A Yoruba-dominated Western Region, and Igbo-dominated Eastern Region, and a Hausa-Fulani-dominated Northern Region.”\(^{128}\) In the words of MacPherson, this development caused “jealousies” that had the potential to shatter the

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\(^{128}\) Falola and Heaton, Nigeria, 153.
unity necessary for “progress.” In his farewell speech to Nigeria, broadcasted nationwide on the NBS radio channel, MacPherson noted that “inter-regional and inter-tribal rivalries and jealousies may get worse instead of better, as more and more power is handed over. I see danger, too, in the excessively bitter exchanges that go on between rival political parties and personalities.” In short, to achieve independence it was necessary to remedy the existing tension and disunity among the different groups.

In some cases, sport actually emphasized and encouraged tribal rivalry, particularly in soccer. The Players Welfare Association (PWA), an organization that promoted matches in support of players’ maintenance, organized “intertribal” matches as a way to bring fans into the stadium to raise money. While these matches, which usually pitted Yorubas against Igbos, were very popular, many looked upon them with disdain. The NDT reported that, “While the will of all Nigerians is bent on breaking tribalism as a divisive force in this country, it is unfortunate that the Players’ Welfare Association should be organizing tribal matches every year.” A growing number of people saw such matches as only reifying and strengthening tribalism in Lagos. One report exclaimed that “Where the Association is wrong is to pretend that the [intertribal] matches, in spite of past experiences, are not doing more damage than good in the country…Tribal matches are never played in the spirit of the game.” Noting that each match was regarded “not as a harmless game of soccer but as trials of tribal superiority


131 “Tribal Matches” WAP May 14 1957.

132 Ibid.
in physique and prowess,” the same article asked how unity could be achieved in the face of such tribalism.133 Supporting this sentiment, D.C. Nwokoye wrote in the *NDT*, explaining that the intertribal matches were “food for thought for every true Nigerian who desires unity for this great country.”134 Each time a match like that occurred in Lagos, complained Nwokoye, a “fracas” ensued and violence was sure to follow:

These inter-tribal matches should be stopped forthwith. As long as they remain, that feeling of tribalism will always exist. Every time such matches are played there has always been a fracas. When the players enter the field of play, the feeling has always been to defend the pride of the tribe. This will do Nigeria no good.135

Nwokoye noticed that “Soccer in this country is gradually taking on a political flavor and the more we organize football matches on the basis of tribe, the farther we shall be from the envisaged unity of Nigeria as a nation.”136 Although sports might be a remedy for the problems that plagued mid-century Nigeria, not every sport was the appropriate antidote.

Seeking a solution for the tribalism that threatened to tear the nation apart, the writers of newspaper articles offered different ways through which to establish a federal system that worked for everyone. Some believed that it was necessary to create a state for each tribe. No matter how many states this resulted in, everyone would be represented.137 Most, however, continued to seek ways to bridge the ethnic/tribal lines and create a unity necessary to pursue and achieve self-government and

137 “Our Only hope: States Based on the Tribes” *NDT* May 10, 1957.
independence. In May/June of 1957, the “Big Three” politicians, Nnamdi Azikiwe (NCNC), Chief Awolowo (AG), and the Sardauna of Sokoto (NPC), prepared for the London Conference where they would discuss the future of the nation. While these figures were important to nationalism and were well-known throughout the colony, none of the three were able to unify the colony behind them, nor stand as a symbol of the Nigerian nation. The push for independence and impatience at its slow progress increased when Nigeria’s sister colony, Gold Coast, received its independence from Great Britain under the banner of the new nation of Ghana in March of 1957. Ghana was Nigeria’s prime intercolonial sporting opponent, and contests between the two colonies offered the opportunity to compare their development and strength, as seen in Chapter 3. Due to their complex relationship as rivals and congruous territories, Ghana’s independence was both an inspiration and a source of irritation.\textsuperscript{138} Consequently, the anticipation climbed for the London Conference scheduled a couple of months later, and pressure increased for Nigeria’s “Big Three” to draw “inspiration from Ghana,” and to “co-operate and ensure that the London talks succeed…[for] Nigeria is ripe for independence from foreign yolk.”\textsuperscript{139} Calls for unity and progress were commonplace in the newspapers, imploring the “Big Three” to work together (Figure 8-24). Writers in the \textit{WAP} pondered the possibility for such a positive outcome of the conference. For example, one asked, “Should Nigeria let slip this golden opportunity to re-assert her manhood and take her proper place in the country of nations?”\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{138} “Call for Unity,” \textit{WAP} 8 April 1957.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
simple unity, then, Nigeria had to assert “her manhood” on the international scene in order to be considered a proper nation.

British and Nigerian politicians were scheduled to review the 1953 constitution and determine the possibility for self-government.¹⁴¹ This conference, which one historian called the “Independence Constitution,” took place through considerable cooperation between Nigerian political parties.¹⁴² As Nigerian leaders arrived in London, the atmosphere was much different than it had been at the previous conference in 1953. At that time, Nigeria was in the throes of the Kano Riot and superficial unity did not mitigate a growing sense that the colony was breaking apart. As noted by Coleman, in 1957, Nigerian leaders of the various political parties appeared to work in unity towards their goal of regional and later federal self-government.¹⁴³ The 1957 conference was monumental due to the fact that, although resolutions for other issues regarding the expansion of states, minorities, and fundamental rights were postponed, it did in fact achieve self-government for the Western and Eastern regions, which would take place in August of that year, and for the Northern Region in 1959. In addition, leaders also successfully reworked the federal structure of the government and instituted a Federal Prime Minister, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. In the words of Coleman, the


¹⁴² Mackintosh, Nigerian Government and Politics, 29.

¹⁴³ Coleman, Nigeria, 376. Also, Mackintosh, Nigerian Government and politics, 29.
conference of 1957 fulfilled two Nationalist goals, “self-government and national unity.”

Figure 8-24. Picture of the “Big Three.” Taken before their trip to the London Conference. WAP May 22, 1957. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.

While it is necessary and appropriate to recognize the hard work and effort to collaborate that the Big Three and other leaders made during the conference, part of the success of the conference may be attributed to Bassey’s victory at the World Featherweight Championship three days prior to the event. In the years leading up to the London Conference of 1957, it was clear that the sport of soccer would not serve

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144 Coleman, *Nigeria*, 376.
the nationalist cause due to the fact that it encouraged disunity and had no international presence. Boxing, on the other hand, did not tend to divide Nigerians and with the advent of Bassey’s victory in 1955, it became clear that boxing would put Nigeria on the international map. Furthermore, the desire for a masculine, national symbol that would provide a corrective for the disunity carved out a unique space that Bassey, and boxing more generally, could occupy in the Nigerian psyche. As Ejikeme argues, Bassey proved to be the only figure able to unite the colony because he was the sole nationalist hero of the era.\textsuperscript{145} In 1957, news of Bassey’s participation in the upcoming World Featherweight Championship appeared on front pages of Nigerian newspapers alongside news about the London Conference. Reflecting the way in which these two events overlapped in the minds of Nigerians, the newspapers included statements from politicians extolling him as a symbol of Nigerian unity and the possibilities the future held for Nigeria. The political action of leaders at the conference and Bassey’s fight for the world championship offered Nigeria an opportunity to assert its manhood on the international scene and prove its readiness for independence. Bassey’s victory immediately preceding the conference invigorated politicians and validated the colony’s quest for self-government in many people’s minds. The contemporaneous nature of these two events cemented Bassey’s image as a symbol of the Nigerian nation, and it encouraged optimism and confidence in both politicians and Nigerian society.

Examined within the cultural and political context of 1950s Nigeria, it is clear that Bassey’s British Empire Championship in 1955 represented a turning point in perceptions of boxing and the nation. This event convinced many skeptics who had

\begin{center}
\textsuperscript{145} Ejikeme, “Hogan Bassey.”
\end{center}
voiced their doubt about the effectiveness or even safety of boxing to support the sport as a tool by which to instill the appropriate masculine characteristic in boys, shape strong and upright citizens, and unify these citizens with the goal of attaining independence. The contemporaneous nature of Bassey’s victory at the 1957 World Featherweight Championship and the London conference validated the virtue of boxing and brought it onto the same stage as the achievement of self-government. Bassey’s political contributions as a boxer and national symbol of Nigeria is further evidenced by the interaction between Bassey and the major politicians of the emerging nation.

**Bassey, the World Championship, and Nationalist Hero**

In 1957, Bassey successfully defended his Empire Championship title against Percy Lewis, qualifying him to compete for the vacant World Featherweight Title.146 Messages of congratulations came from all over the world, reflecting an awareness that Bassey had literally placed Nigeria on the map of the world. For example, A.E. Bassey (no relation), a Nigerian student studying in Raleigh, North Carolina explains,

So many people in American had not heard the name Nigeria so many times in a concentrated period of 45 minutes as they did the night of April 26, 1957. The fight was a brilliant success for Bassey. It was also one of the most powerful and successful advertisements ever programmed on Nigeria…Nigeria was ‘rained’ into the ears and minds of millions of Americans that night…147

As A.E. Bassey’s message to his fellow Nigerians indicated, the boxer embodied both domestic unity and the emergence of the nation into the international public eye.

146 Sandy Saddler, the Featherweight Champion until 1957, was in a car accident and was injured so badly that he quit the boxing game, relinquishing his title. The Empire Champion was given a slot in the eliminator tournament for the title, for which Bassey had to defeat Percy Lewis first in order to qualify. Bassey faced Berrios, from Puerto Rico, with the winner to face the European Champion, Cherif Hamia, for the title.

Recalling the radio broadcast of the fight in the United States, A.E. Bassey claimed, “Nothing like Calabar, Efik Tribe, Eastern, Northern, or Western was heard. It was simply, ‘Nigeria.’” Transcending the regional tribalism that plagued the nation, Hogan Bassey was the face of a united Nigeria abroad. Evidencing the connection between Bassey and the political status of Nigeria, A.E. Bassey exclaimed, “Can we have ‘Kid’ Bassey in the coming Constitutional Conference? Shall foreign managers like Bassey’s talk of putting Nigeria on the map while some Nigerians try to pluck it off the map?”

While many doubted the abilities of politicians to advance the status of the colony, Bassey had emerged as the ideal ambassador as a result of his boxing victories.

Bassey himself was not unaware of the importance of his fights for Nigeria. Leading up to the eliminator fight with Miguel Berrios in early 1957, he told reporters that, “I want to win the first world championship for my native Nigeria, which we hope will be an independent nation in a few years.” Bassey understood that his work in the ring encouraged and, in many ways, guided Nigeria’s progress towards independence, each victory bringing his people a little closer to their desired status. As Bassey wrote to the readers of Drum in Nigeria, “when I fight, it is not for myself. I fight for my country and for you [the fans].” While this might be a platitude, he knew that being a celebrity came with social and political responsibilities: “The way I see it is if a man is in a position where he gets a lot of publicity he is looked upon as a representative of his

148 Ibid.
149 Ibid.
people.”152 Those in the spotlight had a responsibility to act in a proper way to represent their people and make important social connections with other countries.153 Bassey’s importance on the political scene was also evident to Nigerian leaders heading to London for the conference. Reinforcing Bassey’s influence in politics, the NDT reported that the boxer met the Big Three leaders at the Liverpool docks when they arrived for the London conference in May 1957. The report explained that as Nnamdi Azikiwe departed the HMS Aureol, he told Bassey that “you must win the world title for Nigeria.”154 Even more significant, the article described Azikiwe’s enthusiasm for Bassey’s world title fight and compared it to the enthusiasm that Azikiwe had for the conference, intentionally blending and joining the outcomes of both events. Further reflecting Bassey’s emergence as an unofficial ambassador and his essential role in the independence movement, Matthew T. Mbu, the Federal Commissioner for Nigeria in the United Kingdom, claimed

This is the most exciting moment for us Nigerians at home and abroad. Our joy knows no bounds...his ultimate ambition is to win a world title for his country. We have every reason therefore to be proud. For in Bassey, Nigeria is blessed with an ambassador whose standard of unimpectable [sic] modesty has won the respect and admiration of the British public.155

152 Ibid.

153 Ibid.

154 “Zik Tells Bassey” ’Win World Title” NDT May 7 1957. Bassey also met the other delegates for the conference, including the Oni of Ife and Matthew Mbu.

155 “Mbu celebrated Bassey’s Victory” WAP April 5 1957. Born in 1927 in Ogoja, Eastern Nigeria, Mbu at the time was the youngest Federal Minister in West Africa at 27 years old. After finishing school, he became a produce clerk for Holt and Co., rising quickly to the position of produce buyer. A local favorite among Ogoja, he entered politics in 1951 and was elected to the Eastern Regional Assembly at the tender age of 24. His party then sent him as the Eastern Representative to the Federal House of Representatives, and nominated him for Federal Minister, a position that he also won as part of the NCNC, the party of Azikiwe. Mbu, as Federal Minister, became an ambassador for Nigeria in the United Kingdom, where he spent much of his time promoting and negotiating on behalf of Nigeria. “Meet Your Federal Ministers: Fashionable Matthew” NDT 3 April 1955.
It is important to note that Mbu describes Bassey as both a gentleman to be admired and emulated, as well as a successful, international athlete, both necessary characteristics of a leader. In many ways, Mbu used Bassey’s image to validate his own. Like Bassey, Mbu was a well-known personality and a bachelor. He portrayed himself as a gentleman; he was courageous, loyal, and hard to anger, qualities also lauded in Bassey.156 Adopting the boxing language, Mbu was described as knowing “just when to hit [in politics], and then he hits hard. If you go out to campaign against him, then you must realise that you are up against a fight, any time day or night.”157 This description suggests that Bassey’s victories, which cast boxing in a positive light, not only portrayed Bassey as a political leader, but also resulted in the depiction of politicians as athletes.

Figure 8-25. Picture of the fight between Hogan Bassey and Miguel Berrios. Bassey won this fight to secure a place in the final eliminator for the World Featherweight Title against Cherif Hamia of Algeria. NDT May 3, 1957. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.

156 “Meet Your Federal Ministers: Fashionable Matthew” NDT 3 April 1955.

157 Ibid.
Figure 8-26. “Zik Tells Bassey: ‘Win World Title’”. NDT May 7, 1957. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.

Figure 8-27. Bassey and the London Conference Sharing the title page of the NDT. This was something that happened frequently in May and June 1957 as both events took center stage. NDT May 28, 1957. Courtesy of the Nigerian National Archives.
In the days leading up the World Featherweight Title fight, it was noted in the newspapers that two of the Nigerian attendees of the London Conference, Azikiwe and Awolowo, would be taking a small break from the conference to go to Paris, France to watch the match live. They contended that supporting Bassey was a matter of national importance. Awolowo wrote to Bassey in early June, explaining that they were coming to the fight “to cheer you up in a fight which to all Nigerians would be an historic event.” Also attending the fight live was Matthew Mbu, who told the WAP that “To Nigerians this fight means more than prestige, for Bassey is fighting to win the title on

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158 “Chief Awolowo Hopes to Cheer Bassey at Ringside” WAP June 10 1957.

159 Ibid.
the eve of our independence as a gift for his beloved country.” It was clear to people on all levels of society that Bassey was a crucial part of the push for self-government. Bassey was not merely a boxer; nor did he fit squarely in the political realm. Hogan Bassey was Nigeria, representing its collective population, its political and cultural health, and its future as an independent nation.

“And What Reception!”

In the 1957 World Featherweight Championship, Bassey defeated Cherif Hamia in the 8th round of their contest by technical knockout. As mentioned at the start of the chapter, Bassey recalled that he was mobbed in the ring by his Nigerian contingent of fans. As he wrote in his autobiography, “Congratulations were heaped upon me from all sides, and in particular, I am proud to say, from Dr. Azikiwe and Chief Awolowo, who had both come into the ring.” A post-victory image of Bassey with Azikiwe and Awolowo was published in newspapers across Nigeria, linking the political aspirations of the colony with the sporting success of its “unofficial ambassador.” According to Ejikeme, with this victory Bassey had elevated himself to stardom unparalleled by any other Nigerian, past or present. While this is no doubt the case, it was a process that had started several years earlier in 1955 when Bassey won the British Empire title. After his 1957 victory, Bassey was depicted as a hero in both Liverpool and Nigeria. The unease that people previously felt about boxing was transformed into praise for its ability to facilitate unity and political freedom.

160 “Advanced Bookings are Satisfactory” WAP June 22 1957.
161 Bassey, Bassey on Boxing, 63.
162 Ejikeme, “Hogan Bassey: Nigerian Icon.”
Bassey’s victory was the most famous result of a larger process of African international athletes that found success abroad and came home as national heroes. As Baker noticed, “Returning home, they received accolades previously reserved for new heads of African states: triumphal tours and ceremonial receptions, omnipresent pictures and press publicity, troubadors singing their praises, and public works and streets named in their honour.” Bassey, however, was not merely a Nigerian hero, he also captured the hopes and imaginations of the Liverpudlians, a fact that speaks to his international significance and his emergence as a symbol that people all of the world could identify with. Bassey recalled in his autobiography that he felt at home in Liverpool, and that Liverpool had become his adopted city. When he returned to his adopted home, he felt that “No matter which way I turned when visiting the city, I was hailed and praised as though I had been locally born.” Bessie Braddock, a member of Parliament for Liverpool and a Bassey supporter since his first fight in Liverpool, held a reception in his honor at the House of Commons in London, attended by none other than then-British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Bassey was ecstatic when Churchill congratulated him on his success. “I could hardly believe that such an important man had the time to be bothered about a little boxer from Calabar.” This reception, held by English leaders for a Nigerian, points to the connection that boxers like Bassey

163 Baker, 273.

164 Ejikeme, “Hogan Bassey: Nigerian Icon.”

165 Bassey, Bassey on Boxing, 63-4.

166 Ibid.

167 Ibid.
established between nations, races, and political organizations. In Liverpool, such an event had never before been organized for an African.

The welcome that Bassey experienced in Nigeria in early 1958 was even more spectacular. Dr. Jose recalled that “Hogan came home to Nigeria as a national hero and what reception! A huge motorcade drove from Ikeja Airport to the centre of Lagos. All along the route great crowds had gathered to honour the champion.” Bassey himself remembered that it was mayhem, so much that he feared for his safety during his car-ride procession through the streets of Lagos, but enjoyed the extra attention:

Nothing on earth could stop the madly excited crowd, and it was obvious that all the pre-arranged reception went all haywire. I had barely stepped out of the plane when I was hoisted on to the shoulders of several burly onlookers and carried through the seething crowd…The crowd would not be denied a look at their champion and his family. They swarmed all over the cars, so that we were slowed down to a walking-pace…Our troubles were not over for the crowd became wilder than ever, and the policemen standing on the steps of the car were trying to hold them off with long poles. It was agreed on all sides that nothing like it had ever been seen in Nigeria before. It was a never-to-be-forgotten ride down to the Lagos Race-course, where we were introduced officially to Oba Adele and the Chairman of the Lagos Town Council, who made the address of welcome, to which I responded.

Bassey spoke to a large crowd at the Lagos Racetrack and then watched hours of traditional dance performances in his honor. Everywhere he went he was mobbed, even getting into the Mainland Hotel on Lagos Island was a chore. Reflecting the widespread identification that people felt with the boxer, the crowd demanded to see him, and when the police presence at the hotel began to fail, Bassey went onto the

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balcony and waved “for fully half an hour” to placate the fans.\textsuperscript{170} Everywhere Bassey went he was recognized and a crowd would form.\textsuperscript{171}

Evidencing his ability to transcend ethnic and tribal fractures in society, he traveled to the Eastern Region after his tour of Lagos and was feted in Enugu, Port Harcourt, Onitsha, and Uyo. Again the crowds became a problem, this time even more so since police presence in the Eastern Region was not as pronounced as in Lagos, and Bassey found that it “was usually a case of fighting our way through the crowds. At times I took more blows from the crowd than I ever did in the ring!”\textsuperscript{172} Hyperbole aside, everyone wanted to touch the man who had brought such renown to their nation and had lead it to political freedom.

Bassey had rubbed shoulders with and received congratulations from a variety of famous figures, and people from all over the world recognized his face. In fact, in 1958 Bassey was recognized by the Queen of England as a great statesman and was awarded the Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for winning the world title. This award is given in recognition of “significant achievement or outstanding service to the community.”\textsuperscript{173} While the boxer felt that receiving the award was a source of pride, his identity remained connected to the community from which he came.\textsuperscript{174}

When he visited Old Calabar, his birthplace, his people greeted him with a lively

\begin{footnotes}
\item[170] Bassey, \textit{Bassey on Boxing}, 68.
\item[171] Bassey in his autobiography tells the story that he was recognized in a bank in Lagos, and was mobbed so much that he had to escape through the back of the bank to avoid the crowds.
\item[172] Bassey, \textit{Bassey on Boxing}, 69.
\item[173] \url{https://www.gov.uk/honours/types-of-honours-and-awards} UK Gov website
\item[174] Bassey, \textit{Bassey on Boxing}.
\end{footnotes}
reception. More significant, however, they made Bassey and his son, Hogan junior, chiefs in the Ekpe society. This was one of the highest titles/honors that an Efik man could receive.\(^\text{175}\)

Although not everyone was convinced of the value of boxing for society, as evidenced by the words of editorial adviser Geoffrey Taylor that the editor of \textit{DT}, Percy Roberts “had behaved disgracefully in lowering the standards of the Nigerian [Daily] Times by giving the whole front page to boxing” when Bassey won the world title.\(^\text{176}\)

Examined broadly, however, Bassey’s success in the 1955 British Empire Featherweight Championship had turned public opinion concerning boxing from that of uncertainty to confident support. Mr. Harding, the District Officer of Aba, home of future Nigerian World Boxing Champion Dick Tiger, told Bassey on his visit to Aba that his “winning the World title had livened up boxing considerably in the area; in fact, it had got a new lease of life and was flourishing as never before.”\(^\text{177}\)

Furthermore, it turned Bassey into a walking promise of Nigeria’s future. Recognizing his overlapping political and cultural value, Nigerians placed their faith in his ability to unify the nation, shape its people into good citizens, and gain independence for all. Bassey satisfied this trust through his victory at the World Featherweight Championship in 1957. In doing so, he galvanized a whole generation towards boxing.\(^\text{178}\) This is clear when we consider that

\(^{175}\) Bassey, \textit{Bassey on Boxing}, 71.

\(^{176}\) Jose, \textit{Walking a tight Rope}, 250. Percy Roberts was the former chairman of the Mirror Group of Newspapers in the UK and at various times he acted as General Manager and Managing Director of the \textit{NDT} from 1952-1960. Jose credits him with bringing military discipline and strategy to reporting the news at the \textit{NDT}.

\(^{177}\) Bassey, \textit{Bassey on Boxing}, 70.

\(^{178}\) Interview with the “Professor,” Ibadan, Nigeria, July 2013. Interview with Abraham Adeyemi Jones and Olu Moses, Lagos, Nigeria, May 2012.
when defending his decision against Taylor’s castigation, Roberts noted stories and pictures about Bassey served to increase circulation and sales of newspapers.\textsuperscript{179} Bassey’s Empire and World titles showed young boys and men that boxing provided a path towards international and world recognition.\textsuperscript{180}

Bassey’s victories became seminal events in Nigerian history. Akin to events like the assassination of John F. Kennedy or the September 11\textsuperscript{th} bombings in the United States, Nigerians that I spoke with knew where they were when the fight happened in 1957.\textsuperscript{181} If one were to believe the stories, every radio in Nigeria in 1955 (Empire) and 1957 (World) were tuned to the fights. The Nigerian Broadcast Service (NBS) had long been distributing Bassey’s fight results, but by 1955 his fights were played in full. When one former boxer explained where his fascination from boxing originated, he explained “My earliest memory of boxing was in 1954. We had these radios telling us about Hogan Kid Bassey. So we took interest.”\textsuperscript{182}

\textbf{“He Always Remained a Gentleman”}

From the perspective of newspaper articles, Bassey was the catalyst that progressed Nigeria and its people. In reality, however, Bassey was only one man, who happened to be a skillful boxer at the right place and at the right time. The combination of political impatience, economic hardship, and anxiety about gender created a space for an ambitious boxer to become a guiding light for those around him. Due to the

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\textsuperscript{179} Jose, \textit{Walking a tight Rope}, 249-50.
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\textsuperscript{180} Interview with the “Professor,” Ibadan, Nigeria, July 2013. Interview with Abraham Adeyemi Jones and Olu Moses, Lagos, Nigeria, May 2012.
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\textsuperscript{181} Interview with the “Professor,” Ibadan, Nigeria, July 2013.
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\textsuperscript{182} Ibid.
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nature of media, which tends to sensationalize events, and interviews and recollections, which encourage people to think back fondly on the past, Bassey’s ascendancy appears overly monumental and pre-destined. For example, in the forward to Bassey’s autobiography, written in 1963, Nnamdi Azikiwe, then the Governor-General of an independent Nigeria, wrote that

Hogan’s historic win of the featherweight crown did more than anything else to stimulate interest in boxing among the younger elements of his countrymen. Overnight, he became a national hero of sports and the idol of many a Nigerian youth. Indeed, there could hardly have been a better hero, for Hogan had all the fine qualities of a great boxer and sportsman...I wish to pay a singular tribute to this worthy son of Nigeria: both in and out of the ring, Hogan ‘Kid’ Bassey, as he is familiarly called, has always remained a gentleman. In this way he has not only earned credit for himself and his country but he has vindicated the finer qualities of boxing.183

While one might and probably should question the actual influence that Bassey had in shaping Nigeria’s path, as a historical figure his success and people’s reaction to it provide an opportunity for historians to gauge changes and developments taking place within the emerging nation. It is appropriate to suggest that the rise of boxing in 1950s Nigeria should be examined both as a consequence of contemporary circumstances and a lens by which to analyze the political and cultural changes taking place. Looked at this way, Bassey’s victories demonstrate more clearly the twists and turns that concepts of masculinity, sports like boxing, and the shape of the nation took over the years.

183 Bassey, Bassey on Boxing, Forward, iii.
CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSIONS

Hogan Bassey’s 1957 victory in Paris to become world featherweight champion started a golden era of boxing in Nigeria. This dissertation has been a history of times past, of a golden era of boxing in Nigeria that did not last. Nigerians became known in boxing circles as tough, disciplined fighters, and they made significant strides internationally in the sport. Nojim Maiyegun won the country’s first Olympic medal, a bronze in Tokyo in 1964. Bassey’s triumph paved the way for Dick Tiger who would also become a national hero for Nigeria when he won world championships in 1962 (middleweight) and 1966 (light heavyweight). Tiger’s participation in and use of boxing for political purposes during the civil war, however, was one reason for boxing’s demise in the country after 1970. When Dick Tiger became the Igbo partisan, many began to look at boxing differently. Over forty-five years later, boxing has still not recovered the prominence it enjoyed in the 1950s and 60s. Boxing’s demise cannot be solely blamed on Tiger, but one cannot dismiss the fact that participation in the sport steadily decreased in popularity in Nigeria after his death in 1971. Although this dissertation does not address the Biafran secession, Dick Tiger, or their confluence through boxing, it highlights an area that is ripe for exploration. The fact that boxing could not survive the actions of Dick Tiger or the civil war also reveals how complicated the place of boxing is in the history of Nigeria, and it complicates our understanding of the impact of sport on politics, culture, and society in general. Moreover, the rise and fall of boxing over such a short period highlights the tremendous changes occurring in Nigeria. The figure of Hogan Bassey represented the promise of boxing and of a unified nation that has yet to be realized.
This dissertation has explored the relationship between boxing, culture, masculinity, and politics in Lagos, Nigeria from the 1930s to Hogan ‘Kid’ Bassey’s World Championship victory in 1957 in order to shed new light on the role that boxing played in the creation of alternate urban masculinities and the impact the sport had on the personal lives of ordinary Nigerians. In doing so, I have tried to demonstrate the various and often contradictory ways that boxing, within the specific social and economic circumstances in the nation, allowed Nigerian men to create and implement forms of agency. I have attempted to analyze this phenomenon while also recognizing that sport and boxing in Lagos represented a tool for many different groups, including colonial authorities, elite Nigerians, and British companies, to control urban leisure and to discipline colonial workforces. As Obasa found with sport and stadiums in Nigeria, boxing “cannot be separated from the history of colonization, urbanization, or social transformation in modern Nigeria.”

This work has built on and extended pervious scholarship on the emergence of new forms of masculinity in urban Lagos in after WWII. The two forms discussed here- “Muscular Citizenship” and a “bachelor subculture of masculinity”- were based on urban toughness, sport, and health, and they were shaped almost exclusively by young and unmarried men. Boxing is both a lens by which to analyze these masculinities as well an active factor that influenced their development. As boxers gained more prominence and coverage, they became the ideal masculine model, both physically and socially, for the younger generation of boys and men who faced uncertain economic, political, and

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cultural circumstances in the city of Lagos. Although it cannot be denied that British colonial sporting regimes built on and at times transformed Nigerian masculinity, masculine ideals, and gender relations in dynamic urban contexts, a study of boxing demonstrates how Nigerians actively modified gender models for their own uses.

Moreover, this dissertation furthers scholarship that argues that the Great Depression and WWII were indeed important transformative periods in Nigerian and African history. The experiences of war, the training of soldiers, and deprivations of depression and wartime created a hyper-masculine urban environment, one where the physicality of boxing was appreciated, desired, and praised. Boxing’s rise in popularity and importance in the post-World War II era reflects the fusing of nationalism, perceptions of health, and masculinity in urban locals so that the discipline, character, and constitution of the individual was linked to that of the body politic.

Furthermore, this work adds a dimension to the history of the “Black Atlantic” circuit as understood by Paul Gilroy. In addition to the music and literature that Gilroy highlighted in his study, boxing also served as a conduit through which people, ideas, and identities could travel, impacting conceptions of race. Nigerian boxers abroad like Hogan Bassey brought the attention of Nigeria to international eyes at a time when Nigeria was looking for world recognition and in need of an international symbol/representative. Weekly accounts of the travails of Nigerian boxers abroad posted in the Lagosian newspapers not only inspired others to box, but they also made readers aware of their growing presence on the international stage.

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Lastly, this study shows one way that the sport of boxing, and sport more generally, can be studied as another angle of the nationalist movement during the 1950s in Nigeria and across Africa. The commentary during the buildup and aftermath of Bassey’s World Championship victory reveals deep-seated anxiety over the readiness of Nigeria for political independence in the face of increased tribalism and ethnic tension. Bassey’s victory as the World Featherweight Champion in 1957 heralded boxing as a sport that shaped men into disciplined, heathy citizens with the proper character needed to make Nigeria strong after independence. Boxing and sport became vehicles of political expression and were interlinked with political concerns on the local, regional, national, and international level, sometimes at the same time.

This dissertation should not be read as a comprehensive history of boxing in Nigeria, as to detail all the fights, fighters, and meanings requires more work. Future research needs to be done on the spread of boxing in the provinces in the 1950s, how boxing impacted Nigeria beyond Lagos, and how Nigerian boxing further impacted the capital. Moreover, this dissertation deliberately focuses on the period from World War I to the middle of the twentieth century, just before the independence era; the meaning of boxing for an independent Nigeria has yet to be explored fully. Such a study would also provide insight into changing conceptions of masculinity and the relationship between sport and politics during the turbulent 1960s. Lastly, this dissertation could not include an analysis of an important boxer in Nigerian history: Richard “Dick Tiger” Ihetu and how boxing’s popularity has steadily declined since his death in 1971. Dick Tiger’s career began near the end of the period covered here, but he became world champion twice after independence, using his fame to political ends during the Civil War in 1967-
70, using boxing to support the Republic of Biafra. Adeyinka Makinde’s biography of Tiger does an excellent job of detailing his career and international impact, but it was beyond the scope of this project to give that topic the study it deserves in relation to Nigerian political, economic, and social history. This dissertation hopefully opens some exciting future research possibilities. Why Nigerian boxing has fallen into a sorry state is as important as how it became so popular in the first place.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Michael Gennaro graduated from York University in Toronto, Ontario with a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in History, as well as a Master of Arts in History with a concentration in the British Empire in Africa. He received his Ph.D. from University of Florida in 2016. His research interests include sport and leisure in West Africa. More specifically, his work examines how boxing informed and transformed masculinity and conceptions of empire during the late colonialism period in Nigeria.