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Miles Before the Bell: Race, Agency, and Sporting Entitlements in Boxing Ring Entrances

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Miles Before the Bell:

Race, Agency, and Sporting Entitlements in Boxing Ring Entrances

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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by

Rudy Mondragón

2021

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Rudy Mondragón

Doctor of Philosophy in Chicana/o and Central American Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2021

Professor Gaye Theresa Johnson, Chair

A twenty-first century re-emergence of athletic activism and performances of dissent can be seen in the national anthem protests by professional football, soccer, and baseball players like Colin Kaepernick, Megan Rapinoe, and Bruce Maxwell. In 2016, a month prior to Kaepernick's anthem protest, members of the Women's National Basketball Association teams, Minnesota Lynx and New York Liberty, collectively protested and demanded justice for Philando Castile and Alton Sterling, who were both shot and killed by police officers. These and other athlete-activists repeatedly, courageously stood up against injustice, using their platforms as celebrity sports figures to inform sports fans and the world in the age of "shut up and play." Absent from the conversation about the renaissance of athletic activism are the perspectives of prizefighters. I argue that boxers – particularly Latinx, immigrant, and Black boxers – are most often the unit of sale, a commodity, and ultimately pawns in a highly commodified, transactional, and unregulated sporting industry.

To answer the research question, "How do boxing spaces shift our thinking of political resistance?" *Miles Before the Bell: Race and the Performance of Sporting Entitlements in Boxing* scrutinizes the most entertaining and spectacular yet understudied performative component of the sport: the ring entrance.

As part of a long history of pre-fight rituals in boxing, ring entrances also bear witness to Black and Brown performances of radical self-expression that take place in relation to sociopolitical and historical moments. I conceptualize the ring entrance as a spectacular site of cultural production where boxers creatively reimagine an alternative world, inform fans on social justice issues, and resist structural and ideological violence. *Miles Before the Bell* draws on interdisciplinary qualitative methodologies, including four years of ethnographic fieldwork from my attendance of professional boxing matches across the U.S. and visits to over fifteen boxing gyms in the U.S. and Mexico. In that time, I conducted oral histories and in-depth interviews with Black and Brown former and current world champions and collected YouTube media data of their ring entrances. I critically analyze the data, arguing that ring entrances create spectacular sites of cultural production where boxers perform what I call *sporting entitlements*. Sporting entitlements are the fluid, subtle, yet curated ways boxers deploy expressive culture to resist dominant ideologies of subordination through their oppositional identities. Based on ethnographic research and 20 in-depth interviews and oral histories, my sporting entitlements paradigm builds on comparative ethnic and cultural studies scholarship that focuses on non-traditional forms of resistance enacted and performed by marginalized and subordinated populations. The performance of sporting entitlements in ring entrances utilizes the expressive culture elements of music, fashion, and style, which serve as framing devices for a fighter's intervention.

The dissertation of Rudy Mondragón is approved.

Robert Chao Romero

Genevieve Carpio

David J. Leonard

Gaye Theresa Johnson, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

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For

My mom, dad, sister, and brother

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Rudy Mondragón, Gaye Theresa Johnson, and David J. Leonard (eds.), *Rings of Dissent: Boxing and the Performance of Rebellion.* (Under Review UNC Press)

"Yo Soy José De Avenal: The Deployment of Expressive Culture in Disruptive Ring Entrances," in Eds. Rudy Mondragón, Gaye Theresa Johnson, and David J. Leonard, *Rings of Dissent: Boxing and the Performance of Rebellion.* (Under Review UNC Press)

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Ryan E. Gildersleeve, Corey Rumann, and Rudy Mondragón, (2010), "Serving Undocumented Students: Current Law and Policy," *New Directions in Student Services: Undocumented Students in Higher Education, 2010, 131,* (5-18).

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Introduction

Being a political athlete isn't always about grabbing a mic and doing a discourse about racism and oppression. Being a political athlete can be about how you represent yourself.

-Dave Zirin
Political Sportswriter

Boxing promoter Lou DiBella once said, "There's a drama to it. Boxing is theater. If it's not theater, you're fucking up in presenting it."[1] The sport of boxing is a form of theater where multiple narratives are used to create a spectacular drama. The spectacular drama is critical to the boxing industry for drawing in consumers. It gives fans a reason and a justification to cheer for one fighter over another. For me, the most mesmerizing drama was the infamous "Mexico versus Puerto Rico" boxing rivalry. I was seven-years old when I was first introduced to the spectacle of boxing. On the night of September 12, 1992, my father took me to my uncle Felipe's home in Huntington Park, a city in Southeast Los Angeles, for a congregation amongst the men of our family. We chose to meet there because Felipe was the only member of our extended family who owned a "black box," a device that allowed you to obtain unauthorized access to cable television services. This included the pay-per-view event aired by Showtime and Don King's "King Vision" we watched that September night. The man truly responsible for that congregation though, was Julio César Chávez, arguably the most famous Mexican boxing champion of all time. Chávez, who is from Culiacan, Sinaloa, Mexico, was the fighter that my father had a fan loyalty to. My attraction to Chávez was my ability to relate to him. Like my father and I, he self-identifies as a Mexican man, an ethnic and gender identity that I had a basic understanding of as a young boy. Though I related more to Chávez, it was Puerto Rican boxer Hector "Macho" Camacho, whose charisma and performance were most enthralling. It was not because of the way he fought in the ring, but the way he entered it that I will never forget. Since Chávez was the World Boxing Council World

[1] *Champs* (2015). Directed and produced by Bert Marcus. Amplify and Starz. 85 minutes. Words by Lou DiBella.

Super Lightweight champion, Camacho entered the ring first. His ring entrance would be the first one I ever witnessed.

Moments before being called to enter the ring, Camacho was in his dressing room physically and mentally preparing. The Showtime film crew was in there with him and as they started the live broadcast, Camacho became aware of it and began performing for the cameras, pacing in a circular path, raising his arms in the air, and yelling his signature phrase, "Macho Time!" One of the Showtime Boxing broadcasters described Camacho as "one of boxing's most flamboyant personalities, the man who battled his way out of the tough streets of Spanish Harlem, looks to fight his way into boxing history."[2] Ever the precise performer, Camacho waited at the doorway of his dressing room for the sounds of his entrance music, which served as his que to begin his walk to the ring. He chose the same song that Philadelphian Larry Holmes entered with almost a decade prior, the Philadelphia anthem "Ain't No Stoppin' Us Now" by the R&B group McFadden and Whitehead.[3] The song reflected an aspect of Black optimism about upward mobility in the 1970s, as Blacks made strides in electoral politics for the first time since Radical Reconstruction and began to see the effects of the public policy efforts enacted by the long Civil Rights movement.

Camacho's ring outfit bore the colors of the Puerto Rican flag. On his head was a refashioned M-shaped helmet, made of red and white cloth, covering his ears. He wore a blue superhero cape with a white star on the front and on each shoulder. The back of the cape was also blue, with red and blue fringes hung underneath a white "M" that signified "Macho." His trunks

[2] "Julio Cesar Chavez vs Hector Macho Camacho," uploaded by Ximoboxeo ymas, February 19, 2013, retrieved April 5, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ee9gHPeSFU.

[3] "Larry Holmes vs BonCrusher Smith – HBO World Championship Boxing November 9, 1984," uploaded by Jay Seklow, May 16, 2019, retrieved July 30, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFvvUJIIjsU.

were elaborate and complex, bearing the same colors.[4] They consisted of an elastic beltline with wide, long, independently flowing strips of fabric hanging down past his knees. The coloring vaguely suggested a dismembered Puerto Rican flag hanging vertically from his waist. A white star was placed just below his navel, with the most prominent white stripe bearing the word "Comerica" in blue letters.[5] The pattern was similar on the back, with a long red fabric strip mirroring the white one down the front of his trunks, while white strips hung at his hips. Purposefully recalling and recasting Marvel Comics' Captain America, this fashion choice was reimagined through Camacho's Puerto Rican subjectivity, which created a new kind of superhero, one that I would call Captain Puerto Rico.

Camacho was accompanied by his entourage as he made his way through the tunnel, which is the bridge between the dressing room and the ring walkway where a fighter is officially unveiled to the crowd in attendance. The closer he got to the ring walkway, the more he absorbed the crowd's energy. As soon as he exited the tunnel and entered the ring walkway of the Las Vegas Thomas and Mack Center, Camacho's walk transformed into a lively dance. Feeding off his fans' energy, Camacho side stepped, lifted his head to face the sky, and shook his shoulders with great exuberance. The fans at this point were standing on their feet and dancing with Camacho from their seats, waving Puerto Rican flags as they encouraged their superhero during his procession. In my interview with Camacho's son, Hector Camacho Jr., he described this moment stating:

> He fought for his people. For us, Puerto Rican and born in New York, you're not Puerto Rican, you're Nuyorican. You're not Mexican, you're Chicano [pointing at me]. When my father fought, he brought both together. He brought Nuyoricans and Puerto Ricans together

[4] Concepcion Chavez helped with the language of the outfit. She is a designer for Fashion Nova. Shorts are in fringe style, with each stripe freely hanging red white and blue fringe on his boxing trunks. Each color is an individual piece that has been attached to the waist band Fringe.

[5] It is possible that Camacho was sponsored by the financial services company, Comerica Incorporated.

> to watch the fights and be completely happy. Made everyone feel proud about being Puerto Rican. That means a lot to us. In that minute, he let us know we were one.[6]

Camacho's ring entrance lasted just over two-minutes, culminating with him spinning in a circle in the middle of the ring, dancing, acknowledging his fans by pumping his gloved fist towards the four sides of the ring, all while lip syncing the lyrics in McFadden and Whiteheads' song which was admonishing us, "don't you let nothing, nothing/Stand in your way!"[7] His ring entrance is one of thousands – potentially millions – that have utilized expressive culture to perform (un)intentional messages and narratives about self-authorship, agency, athletic activism, dissent, and resistance.

I call performances like Camacho's "sporting entitlements," which I define as the ways in which professional boxers fluidly and subtly perform their multiple identities and subjectivities as well as politics, dissent, disruption, and resistance against dominant ideologies and structures of power through the deployment of expressive culture. *Miles Before the Bell: Race, Agency, and Sporting Entitlements in Boxing Ring Entrances* engages "sporting entitlements" by investigating boxing ring entrances, sites of study that have been overlooked and understudied by Critical Sport scholars and in the interdisciplinary fields of Chicana/o and Ethnic Studies. I argue that boxers – particularly Latinx, immigrant, and Black boxers – are most often the unit of sale, a commodity, and ultimately pawns in a highly commodified, transactional, and unregulated sporting industry. Though they are pawns in an exploitative sporting context, boxers nonetheless utilize the ring

[6] Hector Camacho Jr. (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, March 2019.

[7] My description of Hector Camacho's ring entrance comes from the following two YouTube videos: "Julio Cesar Chavez vs Hector Macho Camacho," uploaded by Ximoboxeo ymas, February 19, 2013, retrieved April 5, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ee9gHPeSFU. "Salida al ring de Héctor "macho" Camacho," uploaded by Toñy Serrano, April 18, 2007, retrieved April 5, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLdgYjvJV_k&t=2s.

entrance to enact their agency and negotiate the structural forces found in the boxing industry through their performance and claims of sporting entitlements.

Most boxers exist in a constant state of economic and representational vulnerability, subjected to the whims of a shifting market, as well as to the effects of neoliberal multiculturalism and dominant ideologies of race, gender, sexuality, and poverty. Yet the ring entrance functions as one of the very few opportunities for self-representation and community agency in the context of the kind of bottom-line capitalism the sport exemplifies. Concomitantly, sporting entitlements can mask the vulnerability boxers experience in regard to upsetting the status quo, political norms, and organizational and cultural structures of the boxing industry. Given boxers' vulnerability, expressive culture – specifically fashion, music, and entourages – become powerful tools that boxers have used to create meaning for themselves, their communities, and their fans. At times highly performative, they occur on a complex terrain of racial, ethnic, and gendered representations of Black and Latinx bodies in U.S. mass culture. They are often deeply contradictory. But they are always important.

Muhammad Ali was one of the most prominent athletes to popularize athletic activism, resistance, and even revolt. He used his prominence as a way to connect to the radicalism of civil rights and anti-war in the Black movements of the 1960s. We cannot talk about athletic activism without mentioning Ali as he is known for sacrificing his boxing career to stand up against the Vietnam War. This political act and protest cost him the prime years of his boxing career as he was denied a boxing license in every U.S. state and stripped of his passport, which prevented him from fighting outside the country. Though the prominence of scholarship and attention on Ali and his contributions to fighting political power are important, it leaves out the contributions of other boxers who have also embodied what Harry Edwards calls the revolt of the Black athlete. The

revolt of the Black athlete is an idea and phrase that analyzes Black liberation movements in the U.S. as they intersect with sport. *Miles Before the Bell* interrogates and builds on the idea of the revolt of the Black athlete in boxing as well as the contributions of many other fighters who perform activism, resistance, dissent, and disruption, primarily manifested in their ring entrances. The ring entrances I examine in this dissertation are situated as ephemeral performative spaces where scholars can find moments in which boxers creatively reimagine liberation and an alternative world, mobilize fans on social justice issues, and disrupt structural and ideological powers. In other words, this study will show that Ali, the most popular and well-known boxer activist that is widely hailed as the greatest of all time, is in the historical company of a long line of boxing rebels who have challenged oppression, established power, and the status quo around issues of power as they converge with race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship.

Exploring the ring entrance and boxers' use of their bodies and deployment of expressive culture requires scholars to study boxing in a new way. In this process, new and different research questions emerge. This dissertation answers the following questions: What role does the boxing ring entrance play in boxing? To what extent are ring entrances sites for athletic activism? How might the arena of boxing begin to shift our thinking of political resistance? How do boxers utilize expressive culture to perform new forms of identities and subjectivities, disruptions, dissent, and resistance?

Theoretical Framework and Methods

Theoretical Framework

Boxing has a rich history of what I call boxing rebels.[8] From the turn of the 19th century, Black prizefighters like Bill Richmond, Jack Johnson, Joe Louis, Sugar Ray Robinson,

[8] Critical sport scholars like Theresa Runstedtler, Louis Moore, T.J. Desch Obi, Dave Zirin, and José Alamillo have contributed rich cultural historiographies on boxing icons like Ali and others, who represent rebellion, resistance,

Muhammad Ali, and Mike Tyson (amongst others) have represented both overt, intentional, and symbolic forms of dissent and resistance. Yet, it is Ali who strongly occupies the idea of what an activist athlete looks like in the sport of boxing. Rhetorical questions from boxing media and fans alike asking whether there has been a more overtly political activist within the realm of boxing since Ali flatter his legacy, but often inadvertently reduce his performances to histrionics, separating them from his politics. These questions do, however, encourage deeper inquiries into athletic activism and performances of resistance within the cultural politics of boxing and how they address society in general. It is also an opportunity for scholars to excavate the many fighters who have built on Ali's important legacy and demonstrate that he is in the company of other great boxing rebels. Cultural performances do not take place in isolation. They are in response to and in relation to the dominant structures of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, immigration, capitalism, neoliberalism, and poverty. Furthermore, the ring entrances that I analyze in this study are carefully negotiated by fighters and are calculated given the instability and deregulatory nature of the boxing industry. The theoretical works of James C. Scott, Robin D.G. Kelley, and Gaye Theresa Johnson guide my critical approach of analyzing ring entrances as spaces that reveal a plethora of performances and ways that boxers communicate discourses, narratives, and stories of self-authorship, political dissent, resistance, joy, and dignity.

Scott's broad purpose in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* is to suggest the possibility of more successfully reading, interpreting, and understanding the political conduct of subordinate

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and dissent to the hegemonic forces of race and racism, gender, and immigration. Their work is aligned with what I call representations of "boxing rebels." Boxing rebels builds on the work of cultural historian Robin D.G. Kelley's *Race Rebels* where he breaks away from traditional notions of politics to examine Black working-class life and politics to excavate their "strategies of resistance and survival, expressive cultures, and their involvement in radical political moments" (4). Boxing rebels are those pugilists who perform resistance politics and disruption, both intended and unintended, that take place within the cultural context of boxing and in relation to sociopolitical historical moments.

groups.[9] In discussing discourses and performances of power and resistance, he advances ideas of public and hidden transcripts. The public transcript is "the self-portrait of dominant elites as they would have themselves seen."[10] These are the performances of subordinated people that affirm and naturalize the power of a dominant class. The hidden transcript is found offstage, "where subordinates may gather outside the intimidating gaze of power, a sharply dissonant political culture is possible."[11] Scott's central argument is for a third realm of subordinate group politics that lies strategically between the public and hidden transcript, which is a politics of disguise and anonymity. These politics takes place in public view but are designed to have a double meaning or to shield the identity of actors.[12] This framing of disguised politics is relevant to professional boxers for two reasons. First, boxers tend to come from marginalized backgrounds of race, ethnicity, immigration, and socioeconomic status, and utilize the sport to overcome their marginalization. The work of S. Kirson Weinberg and Henry Arond and Nathan Hare demonstrate that almost all prizefighters come from low socioeconomic backgrounds with little education, which makes them ripe for "victimization and virtual peonage."[13] In my interview with professional boxer Abner Mares, he explained: "I ain't gonna lie, boxing is the poor man's sport. When have you seen a rich man that likes to get hit? Yes, we have to go in the ring and show with our fists what we're made of. But I saw an opportunity to make something of my life and get my

[9] James C. Scott*, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

[10] Scott*, Domination and the Arts of Resistance,* 18.

[11] Ibid., 18.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Jeffery T. Sammons, *Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 236. In his conclusion, Sammons cites the 1952 studies by S. Kirson Weinberg and Henry Arond and the 1971 study by Nathan Hare to posit that boxers come from marginalized backgrounds that ensures their exploitation in boxing.

family out of the hood."[14] What Mares describes is a particular economy of boxing. Initially, Mares did not like to fight because his father forced him into the sport. However, Mares eventually recognized that boxing held the potential to get him and his family out of the "hood." The use of hood here is representative of living in a neighborhood that is poverty stricken and under resourced. Second, boxing is not centralized or regulated by a governing body. In *The Regulation of Boxing,* political scientist Robert G. Rodriguez posits that "the participants of the sport (e.g., boxers, promoters, managers) are not organized," meaning that boxing has no national boxing commission and instead, the sport is governed by "international associations, individual countries, U.S. states, and U.S. territories."[15] In my interview with Robert "The Ghost" Guerrero, a former International Boxing Federation World Feather and Super Featherweight champion, he spoke about the lack of organization and care for boxers:

> Boxing's one of the most ruthless industries… I think they need to take a page out of professional baseball, football, basketball and look at how they run their organizations and the way they take care of their players after it's all said and done. Boxing is like the wild west right now. You just got fighters all over the place coming in, making money [and] going out with nothing. So, I think they just got to get one big commission that runs it all.[16]

Guerrero's first-hand experience reveals an industry that prioritizes financial capital over boxers – operating as independent contractors – who sacrifice their lives every time they step into the ring. The "ruthless" part of the boxing industry comes from its lack of structure and central governance. Boxers do not have the comprehensive health care, pension or retirement plans, or a minimum salary stipulation that their fellow professional athletes in Major League Baseball (MLB), the National Football League (NFL), or the National Basketball Association (NBA) have – all these

[14] Abner Mares (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, February 2018.

[15] Robert G. Rodriguez, *The Regulation of Boxing: A History and Comparative Analysis of Policies among American States* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2009), 13.

[16] Robert Guerrero (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, December 2016.

leagues having both central governing bodies and player-led unions. Rodriguez reiterated that boxing "has no national professional boxers union, nor any national organization that carries out collective bargaining efforts on behalf of boxers."[17] This makes the foundation and structure of boxing unstable and fragile for the fighters who toil in this sporting industry.

I argue that boxers at times need to perform resistance in subtle, covert, and disguised ways to remain undetected to not risk securing the possibilities of scheduling future fights and potential financial earnings. Al Bernstein, a boxing analyst for Showtime Championship Boxing, described this aspect of the sport as "laissez-faire capitalism run amok" due to the sports decentralized structure and exploitative and hyper-capitalist practices.[18] Given its decentralized structure and exploitative and capitalistic objectives, boxers are pressed to carefully navigate and negotiate this industry's volatile terrain. Boxers often find themselves performing resistance in a manner that Scott calls *infrapolitics,* which is "the silent partner of a loud form of public resistance" because infrapolitics and that third realm of subordinate group politics are nonetheless real politics.[19] In *Race Rebels,* Robin D.G. Kelley builds on Scott's *infrapolitics* to examine methods of resistance deployed by the Black working class. Kelley used Scott's *infrapolitics* to "describe the daily confrontations, evasive actions, and stifled thoughts that often inform organized political movements."[20] The political history of oppressed groups, Kelley suggests, cannot be understood without the framing of infrapolitics because daily and ordinary acts of resistance have a cumulative

[17] Rodriguez, *The Regulation of Boxing*, 13. Rodriguez does emphasize that some individual states do provide benefits such. An example of this would be the California State Athletic Commission, which has "The California Professional Boxer's Pension Fund." https://www.dca.ca.gov/csac/forms_pubs/publications/pension_plan.shtml.

[18] *Champs* (2015).

[19] Scott*, Domination and the Arts of Resistance,* 199.

[20] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 166, found in Catherine Sue Ramírez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 8.

effect on power dynamics and relations. What is key about Kelley's use of infrapolitics in *Race Rebels* is his emphasis on intention. In other words, daily acts of resistance that are outside of traditionally organized movements and politics make a difference whether the groups or individuals performing them intended them as such or not. Boxers at times may construct their ring entrances with the idea of entertaining fans or mentally preparing themselves. Yet, there is something to be said, for example, about the meanings behind the lyrics found in a corrido or hip hop song deployed in a fighter's ring entrance. Corridos and hip hop are genres of music and cultures known for story telling and politicized lyrics.

In studying the life and career of former professional boxer "Iron" Mike Tyson, Thabiti Lewis analyzed how American sport cultures are sites for "racial performance where persons of color are made or unmade in public as hero, enemy/stranger, or antisocial thug through the power of racial representation."[21] Lewis argues that a key turning point in how Tyson was viewed by mainstream society occurred when he switched from a white management team to a Black one. Tyson had been palatable to a white public due to having a white entourage, being depicted as a reformed person who "was under the 'proper' control of his white trainer and white management. His purposefully bland ring entrances did not include any of the hip hop culture in which Tyson, a 19-year-old from the streets of Brownsville in Brooklyn, New York, was immersed.[22] When Tyson moved to Don King's King World Promotions, his entourage became entirely Black. He began entering the ring to the hip hop sounds of Public Enemy, DMX, and Tupac, shifting Tyson to the role of villain in the eyes of the media and public. Lewis's analysis presents an opportunity

[21] Thabiti Lewis, "Don't Believe the Hype: The Racial Representation of Mike Tyson in Three Acts," in *Fame to Infamy: Race, Sport, and the Fall from Grace,* ed. David C. Ogden and Joel Nathan Rosen (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 45-60, 59.

[22] Lewis, "Don't Believe the Hype," 50, 52.

to further deconstruct the meaning and role that music plays in fighters' ring entrances and the extent to which music can function as a framing device for dissent, disruptions, and resistance. Robin D.G. Kelley reminds us that Black working-class resistance can take place in multiple forms, such as rap music, within public transit, churches, households, and dance halls. Building on Kelley, I posit that the boxing ring entrance is a performative platform where infrapolitics takes place through the deployment of expressive culture, specifically music, fashion, and entourages.

Finally, Gaye Theresa Johnson's *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity* is an interdisciplinary text that builds on Chicana/o Studies and fuses theoretical frameworks from Urban Geography, History, Ethnomusicology, Cultural and Ethnic Studies, and Interracial Politics to offer "new perspectives about space and representation that utilize historical and cultural examples with enormous relevance to the present."[23] Johnson is in direct conversation with Scott and Kelley in the sense that her work provides scholars with a new way of reading and identifying the use of expressive culture, space, and resistance that Black and Brown communities have enacted. Johnson introduces the concept of *spatial entitlements*, which is defined as "a way in which marginalized communities have created new collectivities based not just upon eviction and exclusion from physical places, but also on new and imaginative uses of technology, creativity, and spaces."[24] I use *spatial entitlements* as a guiding concept for my analysis and reframing of ring entrances as spaces where boxers creative deployments of expressive culture permits them to perform and communicate new identities and subjectivities, disruptions, dissent, and resistance to dominant structures and ideologies. Deployments of expressive culture reveal the struggles that marginalized people face and aim to address. Despite the presence of divisive politics, anti-

[23] Gaye Theresa Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity: Music, Race, and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2013), xv.

[24] Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity*, x.

immigrant sentiment, and racism in Los Angeles, Johnson shows how expressive culture used by Black and Brown communities was reflected in and shaped by the struggles to claim spatial entitlements. The hip-hop tracks of M.E.D and Kemo the Blaxican, Johnson argues, "reflect the mutual social and musical influences of Blacks and Latinos and offer a distinct and relevant egalitarian imaginary."[25] Boxers do not come from luxury and privilege. Most come from marginal spaces of immobility and containment and therefore use boxing as a possible mechanism to emerge outside of the violent conditions created by structural poverty. Despite these struggles as well as the structural obstacles and boxing industry restrictions, the ring entrance becomes a temporary space that boxers transform for a collective enjoyment between the fighter and their fans. It is also a space where empowered claims to dignity and social justice can be envisioned and enacted. I derive the notion of my theory of sporting entitlements from Johnson's concept of spatial entitlements.

I chose these intersecting frameworks because together, they allow us to see the ways in which marginalized people have constructed their own voices to speak out against the hegemonic powers of race, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexuality, poverty, capitalism, and neoliberalism. The political views, in the case of professional prize fighters, do not always manifest through their own words. When it comes to subtle and calculated forms of political expression, boxers allow us to see the ways in which the deployment of expressive culture holds the language and discourse of dissent and resistance. For far too long, these performances have been solely understood as a thing of sporting entertainment. This dissertation argues that in addition to the entertaining aspect of a fighter entering to the ring to the sounds of Wu Tang or Vicente Fernandez, wearing the brightest of colors on their boxing robe, and walking with an entourage of 10 or more people, these elements

[25] Ibid., 180.

can also be read within its proper sociopolitical and historical context to better understand and deconstruct the political work that fighters are doing with the curation of their ring walks. The work of Scott, Kelley, and Johnson allows for the situating of ring entrances as unique partner to the louder and more overt and "traditional" forms of resistance.

Interdisciplinary Methods: Excavating a Rebellious Boxing Archive

My research methods are interdisciplinary, consisting of textual analysis, ethnography, in-depth flexibly (un)structured interviews, and participant observations. Of great importance to my interdisciplinary methodological approaches is the role that performance plays in this study. While this project is grounded in other fields of study, the concept and methodological tool of performance allows for the analysis of identities and subjectivities that emerge in ring entrances as well as moments of disruption, dissent, and resistance. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* sociologist Erving Goffman defines a performance as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants."[26] Boxers are not limited to the performance of their athletic abilities and skills that are on display for fans or "participants" of the theater and spectacle of pugilism. Before any fighter can step into the ring, they must take that long walk from the dressing room to the boxing ring. It is during the ring entrance, an often brief and ephemeral moment, where the performance of a boxer's identities and subjectivities and at times, messages of dissent and resistance can be found. In *The Archive and the Repertoire,* Diana Taylor argues that "performance" constitutes the methodological lens that enables scholars to analyze events as performance.[27] Events like civic disobedience, resistance, citizenship, race, ethnicity, culture, and masculinities "are rehearsed and performed daily in the

[26] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Double Day, 1959), 36.

[27] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and The Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

public sphere."[28] Ring entrances constitute the least regulated moments of a fight, and boxers often take this time to perform elaborate articulations of racial and community pride, status, and political affinity. By framing boxers as performers, this dissertation closely analyzes, deconstructs, and interprets the meanings contained in the multiple deployments found in ring entrances and ask: How does the performance of self, disruption, dissent, and resistance as well as the reinforcement of dominant ideologies manifest through boxers' deployments of fashion politics, musical selections, and the entourages with which they choose to enter the ring?

The retrieval and identification of disruptive ring entrances contributes to the building of what I am calling the *rebellious boxing archive,* which in the context of this study is a collection of social media data such as YouTube videos, Twitter posts, and in-depth interviews and oral histories with boxers and supporting members. These protagonists elucidate the significance of the boxing ring entrances I examine, narrating the ways Black and Brown boxers demonstrate performances of radical self-expression in their ring entrances that challenge hegemonic forces. This methodological intervention builds on the work of Kelly Lytle Hernández's "rebel archive," defined as the writings, songs, and other accounts produced by survivors of various crusades to eliminate racial outsiders that speak to the words and actions of dissidents in Los Angeles.[29] The collection of these forms of media data have then informed my ethnographic fieldwork in developing relationships with the boxers from the ring entrances I have analyzed in order to conduct in-depth interviews and oral histories. Some of these conversations have also led me to conduct interviews with marketing managers, fashion designers, and musical artists who have contributed in some way, shape, or form to the ring entrances I analyze in this study. As a sub-

[28] Taylor, *The Archive and The Repertoire*.

[29] Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

project of this dissertation, the rebellious boxing archive creates a new and never before collected record of boxers who have made their mark as dissenters and resistors of power in different epochs and historic moments. In collecting interviews with non-boxers, this archives also creates a record centered on the collective aspects of not only the sport but also in assisting boxers political and creatively express themselves.

For textual analysis, I turn to Alan McKEE's *Textual Analysis* and put it in conversation with Mary G. McDonald and Susan Birrell's article "Reading Sport Critically: A Methodology for Interrogating Power." McKEE states that textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather data about human beings to make sense of the world. By making sense of the world, McKEE means making "an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text."[30] Sporting events and sports figures are texts to be read that represent many different things depending on the analysis and researcher's theoretical point of view. Furthermore, McDonald and Birrell contend that reading sport critically is a methodology for interrogating power. For the critical scholar of sport, the methodology of reading sport critically allows for the "uncovering, foregrounding, and producing (of) counter-narratives, that is, alternative accounts of particular incidents and celebrities that have been decentered, obscured, and dismissed by hegemonic forces."[31] By fusing the methodologies of textual analysis and reading sport critically, I will be able to provide alternative readings on boxing that will go beyond the theatrical spectacle of the sport and delve deeper into the political implications of their performances as boxers. In this study, I will engage in the textual analysis of YouTube videos where boxers are interviewed both by mainstream sports journalist as well as independent media figures. This supplemental video data

[30] Alan McKee, *Textual Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 1.

[31] Mary G. McDonald and Susan Birrell, "Reading Sport Critically: A Methodology for Interrogating Power," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 16, no. 4 (1999): 283-300, 295.

is important because it will provide me with the necessary contextual and background information that will support my analysis of fighters' ring entrance footage.

Part of the ethnographic work that I do for this dissertation is seeing ring entrances firsthand in order to collect in-depth and detailed notes. Ring entrances are ephemeral performances that are short lived and easily forgotten because they are followed by the main attraction of the night, which is the actual fight. Part of the intervention this dissertation does are thick descriptions of the ring entrances that I have witnessed firsthand as well as those that I have recovered from YouTube and other online platforms. In breaking ring entrances down, my goal is to take my readers back to the night in which these performances took place. To do this, I deconstruct and describe as many elements down as best as possible to provide a thick description of the cultural productions that boxers generate in the curation of their ring entrances. Elucidating rich descriptions of ring entrance is also important because it demonstrates the complex thought process required by boxers to prepare and execute a ring entrance that is filled with deployments of expressive culture that hold many different meanings. By providing rich descriptions of these deployments, which can be found even in the shortest of ring entrances, I am better able to connect my analysis of how these ring entrances are indicative of the ways that boxers make claims to resistance and sporting entitlements. My work in observing and documenting these rich descriptions are also connected to the ways in which I conducted in-depth interviews and oral histories.

While textual analysis and reading sport critically will provide me a necessary tool to make meaningful readings and interpretations about how boxers perform and claim sporting entitlements, it is necessary to go one step further and include some of the voices of boxers that are found in this dissertation. It is for this reason that I incorporate interviews and participant observations to provide boxers with an opportunity to tell their stories in their own words. The in-

depth interviews and oral histories will range from 60 - 360 minutes and are intended to gain "detailed information about the person's thoughts and behaviors" as well as to "explore new issues in depth."[32] I collected a total of twenty in-depth interviews and oral histories, twelve of which were with professional world champion fighters, three with musical artists, three with fashion designers, a marketing manager, and ESPN boxing commentator. One thing that I learned in my first conversation with Fernando "El Feroz" Vargas was that my interpretations and readings of ring entrances will inevitably have limitations. When reading Vargas's ring entrance in his 2002 fight against Oscar De La Hoya, I made the mistake of declaring the person singing his ring entrance song was famous Mexican singer, Vicente Fernandez. When I mentioned this to Vargas, he quickly corrected me and said it was not Fernandez, but his friend Samuel Hernández who in fact sang his ring entrance song. It was a powerful story about uplifting the voice of his friend who was trying to get his musical career off the ground. This story said a great deal about Vargas, who at the time was presented by the media as a thug who lacked gentlemanly qualities.[33] It spoke to collectivity and a sharing of his celebrity platform to provide his friend with the largest musical stage in his career to that point. Vargas's actions went against the neoliberal values of individuality and individual success and merit. This experience has also helped me reflect on my methodological approaches and enact a philosophy of embracing uncertainty when I conduct and analyze interview content. This idea of embracing uncertainty entails maintaining an open mind and being prepared to pivot from previous interpretations I might have drawn from my textual analysis of ring entrance video data. It means entering interview spaces with flexibility, adaptability, and embracing

[32] Carolyn Boyce and Palena Neale, "Conducting in-depth interviews," in *Pathfinder International Tool Series* (2006): 1-12.

[33] Justin García, "Boxing, Masculinity, and Latinidad: Oscar De La Hoya, Fernando Vargas, and Raza Representations," *The Journal of American Culture,* 36, no. 4 (2013).

whatever takes place and not forming any rigid and static expectations of finding "answers" or "confirmations" to my research questions and arguments.

More Than Just a Walk to the Ring

The ring entrance in boxing is a complex space that requires a deeper examination. I have argued that ring entrances are "ephemeral spaces of possibilities, where fighters are able to use their imagination, creativity, expressive culture, and histories to curate performances of liberation and dissent."[34] Similarly, sports geographer Cathy van Ingen urges sports sociologist to move our inquiry beyond sport landscapes as these accounts tend to be descriptive rather than engaging in the process of unpacking power relations within social sporting spaces. In this section, I demonstrate how the stories of the boxers I examine are ultimately more than stories about boxing. The imaginaries, epistemologies, and ontologies the ring entrances and boxers I examine are instructive for anyone who is studying how power, class, race, gender, citizenship, space, and sexuality intersect in social institutions and social practices. What follows is a discussion about the spatial dimensions found in ring entrances by using the work of Henri Lefebvre on social space to briefly examine a ring entrance of one of the most famous boxing rebels: "Prince" Naseem Hamed. I will also discuss the limited literature on ring entrances and the epistemological possibilities that exist in using ring entrances as a cultural text and unit of analysis.

Spatial Dimensions of Ring Entrances

In *The Production of Space,* Henri Lefebvre defines social space as a means of social production that is also a means of social control, domination, and power.[35] Abstract space, for

[34] Rudy Mondragón, "Yo Soy José de Avenal: The Deployment of Expressive Culture in Disruptive Ring Entrances," in *Rings of Dissent: Boxing and Performances of Rebellion,* Eds. Rudy Mondragón, Gaye Theresa Johnson, and David J. Leonard, (Under Review).

[35] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, OX, UK; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1991), 26.

example, is used and dominated by capitalist systems of production. In the context of boxing and capitalistic spaces, ring entrance can be understood as an abstract space that is mediated by the promoters, managers, television network executives, and elite financial investors as a homogenous space that is ahistorical and apolitical due to its function in producing a financially lucrative sporting spectacle. This type of spatial practice serves boxing industry leaders because it ensures control, continuity, and cohesion in the sense that it maintains the production of a sanitized sporting spectacle that will not disrupt the status quo or negatively impact their ability to increase their financial gains. Yemini-English boxer "Prince" Naseem Hamed is a good example here. Fighting Kevin Kelley on December 19, 1997 was not only Hamed's U.S. debut, but also his first contracted fight with HBO that was worth $12 million. Former HBO Boxing President, Lou DiBella, was responsible for signing Hamed, who had envisioned the location of his fight with Kelley to be the Madison Square Garden as the "proper way to bring him to America."[36] What we have here is a fighter who had a television network investing "10 times the going rate for a featherweight headliner on HBO at the time."[37] In this case, there was a large financial investment at play as well as a network that was trying to properly introduce and frame Hamed as a consumable product. At the time of this fight, Hamed was already known for being flamboyantly entertaining. He was also known for his elaborate ring entrances. Yet, what makes his fight and ring entrance with Kelley unique is the extent that the network had some say on how Hamed entered the ring on that December night.

After Kelley entered the ring, the lights went out in the Madison Square Garden, directing fans' attention to Hamed's ring entrance. As this happened, HBO broadcaster Larry Merchant

[36] Eric Raskin, "The Prince and The Flash: The Story of Naseem Hamed vs. Kevin Kelley," retrieved April 18, 2020, http://fromthevault.hbo.com/#two-open-mouths.

[37] Raskin, "The Prince and The Flash."

mockingly asked his colleagues, "is this a fashion show, Jim, or a prizefight? What do we have on this runway?"[38] Coming out to a montage of sounds consisting of Will Smith's "Men in Black," "Big Mane Little Yute" by Red Rat featuring Goofy, and Beenie Man's "World Dance," Hamed was placed behind a curtain that was lit up to display his silhouette as he danced to excerpts of each song at the top of the ring walkway. In 2013, Hamed sat down with Gary Newborn of Sky Sports and described the influence HBO had on his ring entrance.

> Spending nearly ten-minutes getting into the ring, which was not my fault. I mean I've got Sky footage that was there and HBO footage that show the whole thing, was just completely wrong. I was told by a woman from HBO, "look, I'm gonna give you this que, when I give you this que, you walk straight through." So, I'm doing my dancing and I thought, "Yeah, I'm gonna warm up." I mean, I was wondering what my brother, the DJ, Murad, was gonna put on. Which tunes he was gonna roll out? Because how many could he put on? And I was waiting for this woman, I'm saying, you can actually see my hands and my arms going to this woman, look, "what's going on? I wanna fight!" I didn't want to be out there dancing for as long as I did.[39]

Although Hamed was already recognized for his elaborate ring entrances, his words on this Sky Sports interview reveal the ways in which a fighter's ring entrance can be co-opted by a network to better align with the commodity they have invested in. Leading up to the fight, HBO's marketing machine had hired famous avantgarde fashion photographer, David LaChapelle, to photograph Hamed as well as "spent money on ring entries and on lighting and bells and whistles and stuff like that that we had never done at HBO Sports before."[40] According to DiBella, the money invested on marketing and publicizing Hamed against Kelley "was worth every dollar."[41] There

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[38] "PRINCE NASEEM HAMED RING ENTRANCE VS MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA," June 22, 2019, uploaded by GSD BOXING, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b14xWD2t8Qo.

[39] "Prince Naseem Hamed 2013 LIVE Interview With Sky Sports – Sporting Heroes (Amazing Truth)," uploaded by PrinceNaseemsChannel, June 9, 2013, retrieved April 18, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMFaCQXg-d8.

[40] Raskin, "The Prince and The Flash."

[41] Ibid.

was a lot at stake that night for HBO and Hamed's ring entrance became, to an extent, a controlled space in order to align more so with the networks investment and marketing efforts.

Though Hamed's ring entrance in his U.S. debut was co-opted by HBO, it does not mean that a fighter loses all power and agency to transform the ring entrance into a space of performative potential. Hamed's walk to the ring that night also displayed his unique *style politics*, which Catherine S. Ramírez defines, specifically in her analysis on zoot suit pachuca style, as a signifying practice that expresses difference via various styling practices like clothing, hair, and cosmetics. Hamed's style can be seen in the way he confidently walked to the ring, wearing Adidas leopard print trunks that had "Prince" stitched on the frontside of the beltline, and his signature somersault over the top rope of the ring. This display of stylistic confidence and bravado also intersects with his ethnic and religious subjectivities, Yemini and Muslim, which he always performed proudly, in and out of the ring. Leading up to his fight with Kelley, Hamed declared in an HBO series that his arrival to America was a business trip and that he was "ready to conquer America" through boxing.[42]

Deconstructing the social process of a ring entrance also allows scholars to locate what Lefebvre calls a "differential space," one where counter-narratives of identity, cultural expressions, and resistance are performed in a way that disrupts abstract spaces. Conceptualizing the ring entrance as a differential space presents scholars with the opportunity to examine the multiple dimensions and meanings found in this sporting space. As van Ingen posits, sport scholars "can begin to explore the social production of space, place the body at the centre of inquiry and

[42] "Prince Naseem Hamed vs Kevin Kelley," uploaded by PharrFromHeaven, December 13, 2011, retrieved April 19, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqrwAqkTKQE.

explore the ways in which socially constructed differences are materialized in social space."[43] As such, by locating boxers at the center of my inquiry, I advance the critical exploration of the ring entrance as a spatial practice located within multiple social contexts and reflected by boxers who creatively imagine and perform negotiated and (re)constructed subjectivities and identities as well as cultural productions and political expressions that both reinforce and disrupt dominant ideologies and social structures. Though the ring entrance presents these rich opportunities for research, it has been widely understudied in Critical Sports Studies, Chicana/o Studies, African American and Black Studies, and Ethnic Studies and merely reduced to descriptive writing absent of any substantial analysis.

Understudied in the Fields

Ring entrances have been conceptualized as being part of the pugilistic pre-fight traditions and customs of the sport. Every single fighter in boxing's long history has had to make that final walk into the ring. During the bare-knuckle boxing days, challengers would throw their hat into the ring to declare their interest in battle. In *The Manly Art,* Elliott J. Gorn writes about bare-knuckle boxing in the 19th century and describes the pre-fight ritual of the Burke-O'Connell fight that took place on August 21, 1837. As the challenger, O'Connell threw his hat into the ring first, "then entered the magic circle with printer Abraham Vanderzee and distiller Alexander Hamilton."[44] Vanderzee and Hamilton were both O'Connells financial backers as well as member of his entourage. Burke followed, entering the ring with his financial backers, consisting of a butcher and carpenter. After umpires and referee were selected, the fighters stripped down their

[43] Cathy van Ingen, "Geographies of Gender, Sexuality and Race: Reframing the Focus on Space in Sport Sociology," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 38, no. 2 (2003): 201–216, 207.

[44] Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 44-45.

clothes and revealed themselves to the audience ready to do battle.[45] Part of the pre-fight ritual and tradition of ring entrances is also the function it serves. In *The Art and Aesthetics of Boxing,* David Scott states that "making an entrance has of course always been, since the initiation of modern boxing practice (from the beginning of the so-called golden age in the 1920s), an important part of the psychological warfare of boxing, with the fighter's march from the dressing room in aggressive cowl or ostentatious gown, accompanied by fanfare or loud music and a retinue of seconds and cornermen, becoming progressively more showy as the century developed."[46] Though overly simplified, Scott makes the important connection between ring entrances and deployments of expressive culture to engage in psychological warfare to intimidate opponents. In the 1980s and 1990s, this type of ring entrance was largely associated to "Iron" Mike Tyson and his minimalist style, ominous sounds, and use of hip-hop music. Yet, prior to the golden age in the 1920s that Scott references, there have been scholarly descriptions about ring entrances tied to the racial orders of the early 20th century.

The ring entrance is contested site where racial ideologies and structures reveal themselves within this sporting space. Chris Lamb's introduction in his edited text, *From Jack Johnson to LeBron James,* starts with a powerful story about the day that Jack Johnson became the first Black heavyweight champion of the world. He writes, "when Johnson entered the ring on Christmas night in Sydney, 1908, the crowd met him with calls of 'ni**er' and 'c**n.'"[47] As Johnson made his way to the ring, he laughed, bowed, and blew kisses at those who yelled the loudest and unapologetically smiled as he waited for Tommy Burns to enter the ring. Two years later in 1910,

[45] Gorn, *The Manly Art.*

[46] David Scott, *The Art and Aesthetics of Boxing* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 40.

[47] Chris Lamb, "Introduction," in *From Jack Johnson to LeBron James: Sports, Media, and The Color Line,* ed. Chris Lamb (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 1-18, 1.

William H. Wiggens Jr. wrote about Johnson's fight against Jim Jeffries in Reno, Nevada, stating that when he entered the ring, a live band played "All C**ns Look Alike to Me."[48] In Johnson's fight against Burns, the fan engagement in his ring entrance revealed the racist structure that was horrifically present at that time. His ring entrance against Jeffries demonstrates the same racist structures yet on this occasion, it was manifested through a racist anti-black song that was purposely used to dehumanize Black people like Johnson. Beyond this rich and necessary historical description, the ring entrance has not been centered as the primary subject of critical analysis and scholarly intervention.

The ring entrance has been described by academics, artists, and journalists as a powerful moment that presents an opportunity to explore the making and re-making of identities and subjectivities. In *Boxing, Masculinity, and Identity: The 'I' of The Tiger,* Kath Woodward analyzed Ron Howard's description of the power of Russell Crowe's ring entrance performance in his portrayal of James Braddock in the film, *Cinderella Man.* According to Howard, the power of the film is in how Braddock captivates an audience who, in that moment, have all their dreams invested in this fighter. By analyzing this description and film scene, Woodward argues that the power of boxing is its ability to draw in audiences through stories that feed participants with aspirations of success. This is an important aspect of the theater of boxing, which relies on scripted stories about individual fighters to create a dramatic narrative that thrusts fans to invest in a fight. In the case of *Cinderella Man,* the narrative used is based on Braddock's life. He represents the "white, working-class hero who is taking his chance in the ring, pursuing a path of honour in order to provide for his family."[49] Woodward is correct when she states that moments like Braddock's ring entrance

[48] William H. Wiggens, Jr., "Boxing's Sambo Twins: Racial Stereotypes in Jack Johnson and Joe Louis Newspaper Cartoons, 1908-1938," *Journal of Sport History,* 15, no. 3 (1988): 251-254, found in Kasia Boddy, *Boxing: A Cultural History,* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 287.

presents an opportunity to explore "the interrelationship between psychic and social dimensions of identity and, more specifically, of understanding the making and re-making of masculinities."[50] The idea that the ring entrance serves as an optic to explore the making and re-making of gender as well as other subjectivities is one of many dimensions that can be interrogated. This is something that Carlo Rotella does in his chapter titled "The Stepping Stone: Larry Holmes, Gerry Cooney, and Rocky." In this chapter, Rotella argues that the essentialist portrayal of boxing as a "racial drama" is a reductionist effort that prevents additional critical meanings in the "complex theater of the ring" to arise.[51] Rotella examines the parallels between the film *Rocky* and the Larry Holmes versus Gerry Cooney fight that took place between a Black and white fighter in 1982. To set up his analysis of the actual fight and its parallels to *Rocky*, Rotella starts by describing Holmes' ring entrance, which highlights the deployment of expressive culture. On that night, as Holmes entered the ring to "'Ain't No Stoppin' Us Now,"[52] he was accompanied by American civil rights activist, Jesse Jackson. The interpretations and meanings of music as a framing device as well as having Jackson enter the ring with him are analytical opportunities that remain unexplored. What is the significance of McFadden and Whitehead's song in relation to Larry Holmes? And what did it mean to have Jessie Jackson accompany him, who a year after this fight announced his campaign for President of the United States in the 1984 election? Not to mention that ten years prior to that fight, Jackson had delivered his famous "I Am Somebody" speech at the Wattstax benefit concert

[49] Kath Woodward, *Boxing, Masculinity and Identity: The 'I' of The Tiger* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1.

[50] Woodward, *Boxing, Masculinity, and Identity,* 2.

[51] Amy Bass, "Introduction: 'No Compromise with Slavery! No Union with Slaveholders,' or 'Who was the Last Team to Integrate?'" in *In the Game: Race, Identity, and Sports in the Twentieth Century,* ed. Amy Bass (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 1-16, 14.

[52] Carlo Rotella, "The Stepping Stone: Larry Holmes, Gerry Cooney, and Rocky," in *In the Game: Race, Identity, and Sports in the Twentieth Century,* ed. Amy Bass (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 237-263, 241.

that was organized by Stax Records to commemorate the 1965 Watts uprisings. This example, at the very least, demonstrate the possibilities to further examine complexities and ways boxers have been connected to social activist figures and social movements.

While historical archives and film have been used in the description of ring entrances, ethnographic approaches offer scholars a systematic and detailed methodological opportunity to study ring entrances in more depth. Benita Heiskanen's *The Urban Geography of Boxing* is an ethnographic examination of the links between boxing and the spatial organization of race, class, and gender within the context of the barrio, boxing gym, and competition venues.[53] In her analysis of boxers as entertainers and performers of various identities, she correctly points out that fighters have a "pugilistic podium" that contain "messages displayed in their athletic gear and choice of music escorting the entourages up to the ring.[54] Yet, the analysis of her ethnographic data delves into the realm of anthropological essentialism as she presents three types of ring entrances that her readers can expect from Mexican fighters. "The humble warrior-hero," she posits,

> will enter the ring with simple gear, a small entourage and little other extravaganza, while his boxing style exhibits hard work, skill, and technique. The patriotic *mexicano* will likely enter the ring wearing trunks, robes, and bandanas in national colors, with mariachi music playing in the background, and his boxing style underscores the boxer's "heart," the principle never to quit. A third, hyper masculine type, by contrast, will have extravagant entourages, embellished by glittering outfits, spectacular music and flashy spotlights, while his performance may point to a style that is showy but "sluggish."[55]

Heiskanen reduces the ways that fighters of Mexican decent enter the ring to these three fixed performances and styles. In alluding to and compartmentalizing the style of a fighter, performances of patriotism, use of mariachi music versus "spectacular music," and hyper masculinity to one

[53] Benita Heiskanen, *The Urban Geography of Boxing: Race, Class, and Gender in the* Ring (New York: Routledge, 2012), 29.

[54] Heiskanen, *The Urban Geography of Boxing,* 77.

[55] Ibid., 77.

particular type of ring entrance, she omits the interpretive possibilities that can be read and analyzed in ring entrances that are all unique and distinct based on the fighter. While her ethnography is important given that it looks at gender, race, and class and pays particular attention to women in predominantly male sporting spaces, Douglas Hartmann's critique of her work is accurate when he stated that her work did not allow for a deeper analysis about the things she learned from her rich fieldwork.[56] Nonetheless, Heiskanen's work serves as a productive starting point to engage in deeper examinations about the spatial politics and multiple meanings and cultural productions found in boxing ring entrances.

Epistemological Possibilities

When I say that ring entrances are "ephemeral spaces of possibilities," what I am advancing is an interpretivist approach to boxing that looks "for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world."[57] The works of Thabiti Lewis, Chris Lamb, Justin D. García, and Kath Woodward have provided important work that reveals the potential in centering ring entrances as the primary subject of critical analysis. As mentioned earlier, Woodward's reading of Russell Crowe's ring entrance performance as James Braddock in *Cinderella Man* suggests that ring entrances present an opportunity to explore understandings of the making and re-making of masculinities.[58] While Woodward's analytical focus is the making and re-making of masculinities and identities, analyzing ring entrances is not limited to these. In "Boxing, Masculinity, and Latinidad" for example, Justin D. García examines representations of cultural citizenship and gender by looking at the 2002 match between Mexican American boxers, Oscar

[56] Douglas Hartmann, "The Urban Geography of Boxing: Race, Class, and Gender in the Ring," by Benita Heiskanen. London, UK: Routledge, 2012. 192pp. $133.00 cloth," *Contemporary Sociology 43,* no. 5 (2014), 686-687.

[57] Michael Crotty, *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1998), 67.

[58] Woodward, *Boxing, Masculinity, and Identity.*

De La Hoya and Fernando Vargas. Using a content analysis approach of De La Hoya's ring entrance, he shows that "De La Hoya, while not denying his Mexican ancestry, strived to more heavily assert his American-ness" while Vargas "showcased his Mexican-ness as the core of his ethnonational heritage."[59] To make this argument, García analyzed their musical selections, entourage members, and ring attire. A more thorough analysis, however, would have allowed García to connect a claim he made earlier in his article about the discourse that mediated fans' decision to root for one fighter over the other. De La Hoya paralleled a white-collar "culture of the mind" while Vargas a blue-collar "culture of the hands."[60] As both fighters made their walks to the ring, HBO commentators ascribed to these assertions thoroughly made by García. Vargas entered the ring first, accompanied by Mexican boxing legend Julio César Chávez, who Jim Lampley described as being "a symbol to Mexican American and Mexican fans of Vargas' solidarity with his machismo heritage." In other words, having Chávez in his entourage signified a hyper-masculine, aggressive, and deviant performance. In direct contrast, Lampley described De La Hoya during his ring entrance as laboring "to present himself as a businessman getting ready to go back to the office. You can almost visibly see him trying to control his emotions and stay in a clinical boxing mode as he prepares for this fight."[61] The latter description shows how HBO commentators saw De La Hoya as the intellectual, rational, and more sophisticated gentleman fighter whereas Vargas, in relation to his opponent, was reduced to a machismo hyper-masculine

[59] Justin D. García, "Boxing, Masculinity, and *Latinidad*: Oscar De La Hoya, Fernando Vargas, and *Raza* Representations," *The Journal of American Culture* 36, no. 4 (2013): 323-341, 338.

[60] García, "Boxing, Masculinity, and *Latinidad.*"

[61] "Oscar De La Hoya vs Fernando Vargas 09 12 2002," uploaded by Dorus Mahendra, May 28, 2016, retrieved February 12, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pNOxSqYsOZA.

essentialist framing that reinforced the "discursive conflations of Vargas with criminality, gangs, and thug life."[62]

Thabiti Lewis's chapter "Don't Believe the Hype: The Racial Representation of Mike Tyson in Three Acts" makes good use of Tyson's ring entrances to explore the "centrality of race and its impact on the performance of sport celebrity in our society."[63] Lewis looks at Tyson's ring entrances that featured the songs "Welcome to the Terrordome" and "What's My Name?" by Public Enemy and DMX respectively. In analyzing DMX's song, Lewis argues that the track's lyrics in Tyson's ring entrance are more than just words, "the lyrics are drenched in a dangerous nihilism, challenging not only his opponent in the ring but the world."[64] By starting his analysis in this way, Lewis argues that Tyson's ring entrance is both performative and a sincere attempt to express his identity. In this case, a racial identity that is connected to hip hop culture that rendered Tyson as Black and subject to the double standards of race. Lewis demonstrates this double standard of race well when he discusses the entourages that Tyson had at different moments of his career. Prior to using hip hop music in his ring entrances, Tyson had an all-white management and training team. With an all-white team, Tyson was celebrated as a redeemable hero who was under the right guidance and control. His past and present transgressions were not demonized because his team "often used their white presence- and his white entourage – to put America at ease regarding this volatile Black figure."[65] When Tyson signed a contract with infamous boxing promoter, Don King, his public image in the eyes of the media drastically changed. Tyson's

[62] García, "Boxing, Masculinity, and *Latinidad,*" 338.

[63] Lewis, "Don't Believe the Hype," 48.

[64] Ibid., 47.

[65] Ibid., 52.

affiliation with King, Lewis posits, marked the fighter's downfall and tainted his image in the sense that the fighter's transgressions suddenly became an issue with media and reporters. Furthermore, with Tyson's shift in having a Black entourage and using hip hop music in his ring entrances, the media shifted its narrative of Tyson as a savage, reflecting the realities of racial prejudice and the double standards found in racial discourses in boxing.

Literature Review

Critical Paradigm of Sports

This dissertation builds on the critical paradigm of race and sports. Interdisciplinary sports sociologist Ben Carrington argues that the critical paradigm of race and sport understands Western capitalist societies as defined in relation to colonial expansion and exploitation.[66] Furthermore, the critical paradigm of race and sports centers questions of inequality, discrimination, and exploitation within its analysis. This analysis tends to draw on qualitative research methodologies and is likely to examine the ideological manifestations and impacts of racism. Building on this paradigm, my concern is examining a cultural history in boxing that deals with performances of radical self-expression and political dissent and disruption.

One of the foundational texts to the critical study of sport is Harry Edwards,' *The Revolt of the Black Athlete.* Published in 1969, this special text not only discusses athletic activism and resistance in sport but is also grounded on the author's lived experiences. Prior to the 1968 games, Edwards was organizing amateur Black athletes who made up the Olympic Project for Human Rights, an organization that demanded the restoration of Muhammad Ali's title; removal of Avery Brundage, a known white supremacist, as head of the United States Olympic Committee; and

[66] Ben Carrington, "The Critical Sociology of Race and Sport: The First Fifty Years," *The Annual Review of Sociology* 39 (2013): 379-398.

disinvite South Africa and Rhodesia to convey international solidarity with Black freedom fighters fighting against apartheid in Africa.[67] As a scholar-activist, Edwards's scholarship focused on the intersections of race, sports, and politics, situating the root of the revolt of the Black athlete springing "from the same seed that produced the sit-ins, the freedom rides, and the rebellions in Watts, Detroit, and Newark."[68] The strongest contribution of his text is the idea of the revolt of the Black athlete, which he argues was inevitable that it develop given the "struggles being waged by black people in the areas of education, housing, employment and many others, it was only a matter of time before Afro-American athletes shed their fantasies and delusions and asserted their manhood and faced the facts of their existence."[69] Using auto-ethnographic and self-reflexive approaches, Edwards aimed to analyze a new phase of the Black liberation movement in the U.S. and asked the question: How does the Black athlete respond to racist challenges and affronts to his dignity and manhood?[70] Throughout his text, he posits that Black athletes are the property of white-owned athletic franchises and shows how "like a piece of equipment, the black athlete is used" and remains vulnerable to punishment if they make a mistake on the field or court.[71] Edward's followed this text with the *Sociology of Sport* in 1973, which has served as an important introductory text to the sociology of sport, where Edwards analyzed sport as a social institution. Though Edward's texts are both limited to an analysis of male athletes, they are nonetheless pioneering given the historical moment they emerged out of. During this time, the study of sport was primarily found

[67] Harry Edwards, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete,* (New York: Free Press, 1969).

[68] Edwards, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete,* xv.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., 26.

[71] Ibid, xvii and 16.

in the physical sciences, while mainstream sociology did not see sport as a valid topic of analysis and investigation.[72]

Prior to Edward's important work, C.L.R. James published *Beyond a Boundary,* a canonical text in the study of sport. Carrington argues that James's text "is significant because it initiates the critical sociological study of race and sport, becoming, in effect, its foundational text."[73] Carrington posits this because James employs interdisciplinary methods, draws on a diverse scholarship from history, political science, literature, philosophy, and aesthetics, is critical on popular culture, and centers questions about power to advance a critical reflexive theory of sports culture.[74] James argues that cricket can be used as a microcosm and portal to see how colonization, racism, and classism manifest not only within the boundaries of cricket but to the larger, colonial Trinidad and Tobago.[75] In arguing that, James takes to task Leon Trotsky's critique on sports where Trotsky stated that sports deflects workers from real "politics." Given his experience with sports and politics, James could not accept Trotsky's position. For example, when speaking on power and sport, James articulates that he learned the game of cricket while also being mentored and trained by his father to enter prestige's academic competitions. Throughout this phase of his journey, the school system he was immersed in socialized James and his peers to abide by the codes, rules, and policies of a colonial state. Here he links sports and the school system tandemly functioning as a tool to socialize youth to be loyal to their educational institution, which

[72] See Pierre Bourdieu, "Program for a Sociology of Sport," *Sociology Sport Journal* 5, no. 2 (1988): 153-161.

[73] Carrington, "The Critical Sociology of Race and Sport," 382.

[74] Ibid.

[75] C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, (London: Ian Randle Publishers, 2011).

after critical reflection, James realized was a method to discipline youth on being submissive to colonial Brittan.

Edwards and James produced important texts that laid the foundation for the sociology of sports and critical race and sport studies. At the core of the analysis is an intersectional examination of sports and race, where the interrogation of power and ideological structures is challenged through a sports lens. While James's text makes it possible for sport scholars to use sport as a window to interrogate political struggles, Edward's text makes central the idea of the Black athlete as a politicized figure who performs resistance on and off the sports field and court. These texts emerged during an active decade of Black athletic activism, which came with the limitations of predominantly studying the experiences of Black male college and professional athletes.

Critical Boxing Studies

The study of boxing spaces has been largely conducted by using ethnographic sociological methods. Loïc Wacquant's *Body and Soul* is a good example of this. In his text, Wacquant depicts how boxers conceptualize their lives, work, and social relations within the everyday culture of the sport of boxing. He argues that boxing serves as "the vehicle for a project of ontological transcendence whereby those who embrace it seek literally to fashion themselves into a new being."[76] In describing the fashioning of oneself into a new being, Wacquant is talking about the identity formation process that he observed while conducting his study in a boxing gym situated in predominantly Black neighborhood in the South Side of Chicago. Wacquant describes the gym as "a complex and polysemous institution, overloaded with functions and representations that do not readily reveal themselves to the outside observer, even on acquainted with the nature of the

[76] Loïc J.D. Wacquant, *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 190.

place."[77] A boxing gym is precisely a complex institution with a plethora of activities taking place. It is a location "where the pugilist molds himself into shape; the workshop wherein is manufactured the body weapon and shield that he intends to launch into confrontation in the ring."[78] Wacquant is correct in showing how a boxing gym helps prepare a boxer for future match ups in the ring, but there are other manifestations that also take place in the boxing gym. The limitations of his work are his lack of recognition of women as well as being more self-reflexive and critical about his role as a white male entering a predominantly Black male and working-class community. By going native and competing as an amateur boxer himself, Wacquant to an extent reinforces the idea that sports transcend race when he stated that "over time [my] 'whiteness receded' as [I] became a better fighter" and that a boxer's phenotype is blurred due to their fighting ability and embodiment of masculine values of boxing.[79]

In addition to Wacquant's ethnographic work in a boxing gym, there is also the work of John Sugden, Benita Heiskanen, and Lucia Trimbur. Sugden's *Boxing and Society* (1997) argues, "boxing in its various settings in the modern world is but the leading edge of complex cultural and institutional processes which are rooted in the deconstruction and reformation of dominant forms of social, economic, and political life."[80] During his fieldwork in Belfast, Northern Ireland at the Holy Family Boxing Club, Sugden found that boys did not come to the boxing club to learn self-defense to keep them safe on the streets nor were the youth simply attracted to the violent aspect of the sport. Given the routine street crime and gang fighting in Belfast, "the Holy Family is a

[77] Ibid., 13.

[78] Ibid., 14.

[79] Loïc J.D. Wacquant, "Carnal connections: On embodiment, apprenticeship, and membership," *Qualitative Sociology* 28, no. 4 (2005): 445-474, 453 found in Carrington, "The Critical Sociology of Race and Sport," 386.

[80] John Sugden, *Boxing and Society: An International Analysis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 4.

relative haven from violence" for young boys.[81] Sugden argues that although boxing exploits a person's body in the form of selling their body for abuse and for the pleasure of others, it also liberates as it is a form of resistance that makes it something more than just a sport, as "it is a savior of the oppressed and a theatre of their dreams."[82] Different from Sugden's examination of young boys in an Irish boxing gym, Heiskanen's *The Urban Geography of Boxing* (2012) suggests that women boxers in Austin, Texas "have not only 'de-gendered' boxing gyms as male-only spaces but have also complicated the established pugilistic social organization by jumbling up the power dynamics of gendered bodies interacting in the sport's everyday locations."[83] The women Heiskanen interviewed belong to a heterogeneous group consisting of intersecting identities that speak to their racial and ethnic, class, career, and educational experiences. Heiskanen suggests that the gym and the bodies present there become a space for empowerment, reinvention of identities, social rehabilitation, crossing boundaries, and individual acts of transgression by embodying multiple identity positions.[84]

More recently, Trimbur's *Come Out Swinging* (2013) focused on Gleason's Gym in Brooklyn and the post-industrial landscape of New York in the early 2000s. Her focus is on the changes in boxing gyms in the 1980s, when women and white-collar clients were welcomed to the gym as well as how gyms provided the possibilities of developing new identities. In this "new economy" of unemployment and fewer blue-collar jobs and dismantling of welfare programs, deterioration of public education, and extreme focus on law and order, Trimbur's work analyzes

[81] Sugden, *Boxing and Society*, 99.

[82] Ibid., 189-190.

[83] Benita Heiskanen, *The Urban Geography of Boxing: Race, Class, and Gender in the* Ring (New York: Routledge, 2012), 29.

[84] Heiskanen, *The Urban Geography of Boxing*.

how groups of gym members use the gym in a variety of ways. Specifically, the gym as a social space and how people negotiate life in postindustrial New York. Her first argument is an important one as she complicates neoliberal multiculturalism and economics, arguing that Gleason's has survived the postindustrial economy because it turned to diversity, cosmopolitanism and aggressive advertising, and focusing on the emerging body and fitness industry.[85] Here, she makes the link between a boxing gym in Brooklyn and processes of gentrification to show that restructuring has made it tough for neighborhood gyms to keep up with inflation, rising prices of insurance, and real estate rates. With the changes she mentions, Gleason's remained because management adjusted to the changes that came with gentrification, opening its doors to wealthier patrons and employing *white collar boxing*. White collar boxers are wealthy (mostly white) men who are "preoccupied with their masculinity and attracted to the bodily strength of black men" and seek "a powerful manhood by proximity to blackness."[86] In other words, Blackness is a site of racial, cultural, and masculine capital that has exchange value, which can also be seen as embodying new forms of anti-blackness racism. This is further complicated as Trimbur shows that a white-collar boxing clientele opens the possibility for Black trainers in the postindustrial New York moment to create job opportunities for themselves by training affluent white men. Trimbur's work is a great addition to the scholarship on sport that uses ethnographic methods to study boxing gyms. It is in conversation with Wacquant's *Body and Soul* as it offers a contemporary look and more nuanced and complicated approach to studying boxing gyms in communities that are undergoing drastic changes. The discussed ethnographies here all provide in-depth looks at

[85] Lucia Trimbur, *Come out Swinging: The Changing World of Boxing in Gleason's Gym* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

[86] Trimbur, *Come out Swinging*, xx.

specific boxing gym social contexts and stage interventions about the meanings of race, gender, space, boxing, neoliberalism, and political economy.

Beyond ethnography, there have also been interdisciplinary approaches to the critical study of boxing. Ben Carrington's *Race, Sport and Politics* relies on discourse analysis, textual readings, social theory, and eclectic interpretive and historical frameworks that "extends far beyond the comfortable and predictable boundaries that many traditional sociologists, bound to hypothesis testing and statistical verification, would recognize as legitimate, in order to make sense of modern manifestations of race."[87] At the beginning of his text, Carrington posits that: 1) the *black athlete* has political meanings and global impacts; 2) sports plays a role in making and remaking western ideas of racial difference; and 3) sport plays a role in the forging of gendered, national, and racial identities within the broader African diaspora.[88] Carrington notes that the *black athlete* was created when Jack Johnson became the first Black heavyweight boxing champion of the world. Johnson's victory over white pugilist Tommy Burns in 1908 subverted dominant ideas of white physical superiority. By specifically addressing sport's historical and present-day role in shaping racial discourse, Carrington posits that sport reproduces race. To strengthen this position, he advances the term *racial signification of sport* "to indicate how sport, as a highly regulated and embodied cultural practice, has, from its manifestation as a modern social institution during the high-period of European imperialist expansionism, played a central role in popularizing notions of absolute biological difference" while also providing spaces for different forms of resistance against white racism."[89] In chapter three, Carrington pays close attention to the matchup between Mike Tyson

[87] Ben Carrington, *Race, Sport and Politics: The Sporting Black Diaspora* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2010), 13-14.

[88] Carrington, *Race, Sport and Politics*.

[89] Ibid., 3.

and Frank Bruno and the ways that these two Black boxers were represented by the media through the tropes of madness, savagery, and respectability. While he problematizes the ways in which the media represented Tyson and Bruno, Carrington also shows how these two men transformed over the years, arguing that "their 'new' public personas present us with ways to think about identity and gender politics that challenge and offer an alternative to the damaging logic of sporting competition and masculine domination."[90]

While Carrington's study looks at sports broadly to examine its role in racial formation, Theresa Runstedtler and Louis Moore take on a historical approach to pay close attention to the experiences of Black boxers at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. Runstedtler's *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner* situates boxing as more than a metaphorical site as she contends that "it was a public forum in which racial divisions were drawn and debated" and where Black male boxing victories challenged white supremacy and Darwinian thought.[91] As a cultural historian, Runstedtler is responsible in looking at Johnson as a complicated figure, noting that he and other Black athletes were certainly flawed at the detriment of Black women and queer communities yet also powerful in the ways in which they asserted Black identity as well as challenged and resisted white supremacy through their everyday action. The purpose of her transnational historical study is to demonstrates Johnson's international impact, arguing that he was a rebel sojourner who traveled in search of unprejudiced places to ply his trade as a boxer but despite his travels or amount of fame he earned, Johnson and other Black boxers could never fully escape the global color line of the moment.[92] Runstedtler's treatment of gender is an important one as she identifies the bourgeois

[90] Ibid., 105.

[91] Theresa Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner: Boxing in the Shadow of the Global Color Line* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 22.

[92] Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner*.

white male Victorian values of industry, thrift, and restraint that was highly celebrated during this time. She draws on Michel Foucault's biopolitics to show how boxing was a powerful tool to normalize the white male body. At the time of Johnson's career, white Victorian notions of manliness were beginning to fall by the wayside, as a new form of masculinity emerged. Aware of these changes, Johnson's deployment of expressive culture (i.e. Black dandy), use of space (frequenting white spaces of leisure), and conspicuous consumption were not only a matter of style but also a form of political resistance that went against dominant racial, gender, and sexual norms.

In *I Fight for a Living,* sport historian Louis Moore builds on Runstedtler's work, situating Jack Johnson's rise within the context of Black working-class manhood. Runstedtler demonstrates that Johnson and other Black fighters were rebels who intentionally challenged hegemonic notions of white manhood. Moore's in conversation with Runstedtler and adds that not every action disrupted dominant ideologies as some Black boxers also "purposely molded themselves in the image of the middle-class, not so much as a challenge to white hegemony, but as an assertion of their own autonomy."[93] Moore's research narrative is guided by his textual analysis of turn of the century newspaper archives that focused on the lives of Black prizefighters. He advances *colored sport*, a concept that builds on the work of Howard P. Chudacoff, who argued that bachelor subcultures provided alternative notions of manhood that differed from Victorian culture.[94] *Colored sport* is an important intervention as it emphasizes a racialized distinction to Black bachelors who risked their lives every time they frequented white spaces of leisure. Moore's book unveils the multiple ways boxers performed Black masculinity that both challenged and utilized representations of the middle-class to assert their own agency and constructions of manhood.

[93] Louis Moore, *I Fight for a Living: Boxing and The Battle for Black Manhood, 1880-1915* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 12.

[94] Moore, *I Fight for a Living*.

These versions of manhood were fluid and their claims to racial equality produced discursive and ideological assaults to white supremacy. By using historical methods, Runstedtler's and Moore's scholarly interventions fall under the critical paradigm of race and sport as they centrally locate boxing within a context of political struggle and examine dominant constructions of manhood and race as well as performances of resistance to white middle-class Victorian manhood.

Expressive Culture and Resistance

Jack Johnson is a powerful example of how style and expressive culture can be used to perform political resistance that challenged dominant ideas of race, gender, and sexuality. Central to my concept of *sporting entitlements* is the ways that boxers use expressive culture in their ring entrances to assert their agency and self-author their identities and politics. In this section, I will discuss some of the literature on expressive culture that I will build on and apply to my analysis of how ring entrances are spaces where boxers critique systems and ideologies of power.

Interdisciplinary scholar Clyde Woods' *Development Arrested* is a text about African American communities in the Mississippi delta that examines the plantation regime's power and African American's utilization of a *blues epistemology,* a method and theory of resistance. Blues epistemology is created by working class African Americans in response to systems of power. Wood argues that "what is being expressed in the blues and its extensions is a critique of plantation culture in all its manifestations."[95] As such, blues epistemology has a longstanding history in Black tradition as the expressive culture of blues music was constructed within (and in resistance to) an antebellum plantation regime context. Woods further argues that regional issues matter as his examination of this space allows us to see how organized regional power is structured. Woods's work on blues epistemology and regional spaces serves as a foundational basis for George Lipsitz's

[95] Clyde Adrian Woods, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (New York: Verso, 1998), 20.

How Racism Takes Place and his conceptualization of the *Black spatial imaginary.* Lipsitz's posits that when people do not control or own physical places, they often construct discursive spaces as sites of agency, mutual affiliation, and imagination. As an ethno-spatial epistemology, the Black spatial imaginary is "based on privileging use value over exchange value, sociality over selfishness, and inclusion over exclusion."[96] Through solidarity within these spaces, the Black spatial imaginary is a direct form of resistance to the moral geographies of purity and homogeneity of space crafted by the white spatial imaginary.

Prior to Lipsitz's *How Racism Takes Place,* Robin D.G. Kelley, Luis Alvarez, Catherine Ramírez, and Anthony Macías all examined the powerful role expressive culture plays in manifesting and performing resistance. Alvarez's *The Power of the Zoot* looked at the multiple meanings and popularity of the zoot suit during World War II. Through the use of the zoot suit, he coins the term *body politics of dignity* to argue that bodies are used to resist and confront the denial of one's dignity due to their bodies being discursively constructed as a dangerous criminal.[97] What is important about Alvarez's work is his framing of resistance as something that is not always intended yet the sociopolitical moment renders certain acts as resistant or disruptive of dominant ideologies of race and gender. He states, "suiters struggle for dignity may not have always, or even often, have directly challenged the racism and sexism of the state, middle-class social reformers, or the wartime political economy, they did at times subvert dominant race and gender relations and thus make them unworkable in the everyday circles of youth."[98] Catherine Ramírez examines the zoot suit through a Chicana feminist perspective and situates it as a cultural text to argue that

[96] George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 61.

[97] Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance During World War II* (UC Press: Los Angeles, 2008).

[98] Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot,* 9.

pachucas have been invisible in most narrations of 20th century Mexican American history. She also locates la pachuca in a historical and cultural landscape to demonstrate that this seemingly unimportant and often overlooked figure has much to teach use about nationalisms, citizenship, and resistance culture, gender, and sexual identities and their contradictions.[99] Anthony Macías builds on Ramírez's work in *Mexican American Mojo,* which focuses on the 1935-1968 time period to historically look at Mexican Americans' multifaceted cultural productions and evolving affiliations with other non-white groups during a time of racism, anticommunism, patriotism and property, and law and order.[100] Macías aligns himself with Ramírez and Robin D.G. Kelley's analysis of expressive culture as a coping tool for marginalized peoples and the possibilities that music, fashion, and dance poses in challenging and reproducing dominant ideologies.[101] Drawing from Ramírez's concept of style politics and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto's work on rasquachismo, Macías shows how clothing functions as a form of expressive culture that contains dynamic aesthetics of style, improvisation, adaption, and creativity. Finally, Macías is in conversation with Kelley and Alvarez on the limitations of expressive culture in that structural critiques were not always offered by those who wore zoot suits and at times also reproduced dominant ideologies.

The Politics of Representation and Neoliberal Multiculturalism

Boxing is a sport that utilizes neoliberal multiculturalism to exploit the subjectivities and experiences of fighters that they represent to create the theatrical scripts of individual boxing matches. Theatrical scripts are necessary for two reasons. The first deals with boxing having a high

[99] Catherine Sue Ramírez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), XIV-XV.

[100] Anthony Macías, *Mexican American Mojo: Popular Music, Dance, and Urban Culture in Los Angeles, 1935-1968,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 285.

[101] Macías, *Mexican American Mojo.*

degree of turnover. This is due to the short lifespan that comes with being a boxer in a physically abusive sport. Secondly, unlike team sports, which have years of carefully constructed narratives of "rivalries," boxing engages in an ongoing practice of carefully packaging, branding, and representing fighters in ways that maximizes the industry's earning potential. Therefore, the creation of boxing rivalries and theatrical scripts become important when trying to market boxing matches that are unique to the two fighters that are facing each other. Though the match ups are unique, the tropes, stereotypes, and racial scripts used are recycled and applied to fighters. Some of the most common theatrical scripts use race, ethnicity, nationalism, and class to package fights in palatable ways. This is commonly seen in the Mexico versus Puerto Rico rivalry as well as the Black versus the great white hope trope made infamous by journalist Jack London as he wrote about the matchup between Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries.

I situate my understanding of race and racial frameworks by drawing on Michael Omi and Howard Winant, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, and Kathleen Yep. Sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant's *Racial Formations in the United States* centralizes race in the organization of political life in the U.S. and advances the concept of *racial projects.* Racial projects capture a process of racial formation that attempts to shape the ways in which human identities and social structures are racially signified and the reciprocal ways that racial meaning becomes embedded in social structures.[102] An example of a racial project is colorblindness, an ideological and hegemonic concept of race in U.S. society that asserts that "the goals of civil rights movement have been substantially achieved" and that "overt forms of racial discrimination are a thing of the past" and that the U.S. is close to achieving a "post-racial" societal status.[103] In *Racism without Racists,*

[102] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

[103] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formations,* 257.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva identifies colorblind racism as the new racial ideology and argues that it is a loosely organized set of ideas, phrases, and stories that help whites to justify contemporary white supremacy.[104] Rather than focus on overt forms of racism, Bonilla-Silva urges scholars to deeply study colorblindness due to how it has been institutionalized and dangerously embedded in societal structures and social relations like politics, economics, and ideologies. The sport of boxing to an extent is a bit different and complicates the ways in which Omi and Winant and Bonilla-Silva conceptualize colorblindness as race has not always been hidden from popular narratives within the sport. From Jack Johnson to Floyd Mayweather Jr, race, specifically Blackness, has been at the forefront of the boxing spectacle. It has historically been presented in obvious, essentialized, and visible ways, which speaks to how those that represent the narratives in boxing have controlled and calculated the ways in which race is spoken about in a sanitized manner that serves to build up a sporting drama with the purpose of accumulating maximum profits.

Kathleen Yep's works is instructive here. Yep's article, "Peddling Sport," is helpful in making sense of how racial representations in boxing are processed through liberal multiculturalist discourse. Yep argues that the media deploys a liberal multiculturalist discourse to depict professional basketball as a post-racial space where all talented players can thrive if they work hard enough.[105] Furthermore, Yep challenges meritocratic contentions made by liberal and conservative commentators to show how racial projects reinforce liberal multicultural imaginings of sport, which only serves to perpetuate colorblind politics and white supremacy.[106] Yep

[104] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 240.

[105] Kathleen S. Yep, "Peddling sport: Liberal multiculturalism and the racial triangulation of blackness, Chineseness and Native American-ness in professional basketball," *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 35 no. 6 (2012): 971-987.

[106] Yep, "Peddling sport."

integrates Claire Kim's concept of racial triangulation to move beyond the Black and white binary and further argues "marginalized groups are constructed in relation to each other in a 'field of racial positions.'"[107] Yep finds that basketball players in the 1930s were coded and organized into the following three racial categories: hero, threat, and novelty. The triangulation and categorization of basketball players further served to privilege whiteness and replicate racialized and gendered images. Thomas Faist is also helpful here in understanding how whiteness and normative understandings are replicated. Faist states that an emphasis on cultural diversity and teaching of tolerance functions to mask the structures of inequality and white privilege through the disguise of celebrating hyper-racialization as spectacle.[108] Yep's work is important because it allows sport scholars today to examine how athletes of color are deracialized (as well as emasculated) by the media to appear less threatening and made consumable by conservative and liberal audiences who celebrate fabricated notions of diversity, multiculturalism, and social justice.

Justin García's work is a great example of how sport scholars can build an analysis based on the binary representations that emerge in opposition and in relation to fighters who are pinned against each other. Going back to his article "Boxing, Masculinity, and Latinidad," García focuses his analysis on Oscar De La Hoya in relation to his opponent Fernando "El Feroz" Vargas. By analyzing these fighters as cultural texts, one can situate them in the context of what Stuart Hall calls binary oppositions. Stuart Hall contends that racialized discourses are structured by binary oppositions that contain "a powerful opposition between 'civilization' (white) and 'savagery' (black)."[109] I argue that every single boxing match is composed of binary oppositions that are ripe

[107] Ibid., 973.

[108] Thomas Faist, "Diversity – a new mode of incorporation? *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 32 no.1 (2009): 171-190, found in Kathleen S. Yep, "Peddling sport."

[109] Stuart Hall, "The spectacle of the 'other,'" in *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices,* ed. Stuart Hall (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications and Open University, 1997), 243.

for interpretation, deconstruction, interrogation, and analysis. The theatrical drama that is created by HBO and Showtime for example, is dependent on creating a consumable binary conflict (Good vs. Bad, Mexican vs. Mexican American, Black vs. White, Silver Spoon vs. Working Class) out of each fighters' subjective differences, which reproduces dominant narratives, stereotypes, and essential representations of nonwhite and working-class fighters. This political struggle can be seen when the color line was drawn, preventing Jack Johnson an opportunity to fight for the heavyweight title, until 1908. A century later, this similar theatrical script applied to the match-up between Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Conor McGregor, where McGregor presented the possibility of being a modern day "Great White Hope."

Post-racial colorblindness in U.S. society and liberal multiculturalist discourses continue to be used in the present as fans and consumers of boxing are introduced to a new form of racial currency that creates toxic discursive spaces consisting of attitudes and beliefs of racism, religious chauvinism, xenophobia, and anti-immigrant sentiment. In other words, situating my dissertation in the post-9/11 moment is intentional and important because it is a time when a highly charged racial project infiltrated sporting spaces with the purpose of diffusing dominant ideologies of citizenship, belonging, and forced patriotism and nationalism. The post-9/11 moment is one in which athletes were confronted with the question of how to navigate their performances of race and other identities as well as resistance to ideological and structural powers. Sylvia Wynter's "'No Humans Involved:' An Open Letter to my Colleagues" is instructive here.

In her writing, Wynter's discusses the system of categorization used in a radio news report following the acquittal of policemen in the Rodney King beating, stating that public officials' use of the acronym NHI referred "to any case involving a breach of the rights of young Black males

who belong to the jobless category of the inner city ghetto."[110] NHI or "no humans involved" has cultural and ideological implications as it socializes institutional agents (cops) and the masses to treat people classified under this acronym as unfit for humanity. This equips people to treat them in any way they see fit, which can be abusive, violent, and dehumanizing. Boxers, particularly Black and Brown fighters, come from the most marginal backgrounds of our global society. They are, in a way, NHI's prior to making a name for themselves in the boxing industry and to an extent, remain NHI's if they don't play by the rules set by the boxing industry. This adds an additional layer to my contention that boxers, whether it's the one percent of boxers who make the most money in the industry or the up-and-coming fighters who get paid very little, are vulnerable subjects. Wynters argues that for the "breadwinners" in the ghettos, "their Conceptual Others are those who make possible their accelerated enrichment."[111] In this case, the breadwinners are the promoters, investors, and managers of the boxing industry who need Black and Brown fighters to make the financial wheels of the boxing industry continuously spin. At the time of her writings, Wynter challenged intellectuals to marry their thoughts with the type of human suffering that often gets written out or omitted from academic work. For my work, it is marrying my thoughts with boxers who can be pushed to the sidelines by academics who simply see them as subjects not involved in critical or revolutionary demonstrations towards freedom and liberation. In the context of the acquitted cops who beat Rodney King and the two-day uprisings that followed, Wynters posed a question about the impact made by the people who took to the streets: "How then did they change the course of North American history in two days?"[112] I apply this kind of thinking to my

[110] Sylvia Wynters, "No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to my Colleagues," in *Forum N.H.H. Knowledge for the 21st Century* 1 no.1 (1994) 42-71, 42.

[111] Wynters, "No Humans Involved, 64.

[112] Ibid, 65.

work as a critical sport scholar and ask: How do boxers change the way we think about freedom and liberation in the short time they are given via their ring entrances? In these 30 second to 10-minute moments, we can excavate the ways in which boxers insert their own truths through the deployment of expressive culture. These truths communicate new conceptualizations of agency, freedom, and liberation, which teaches us that resistance is pluralistic, and its manifestations include many faces and layers.

Chapter Organization

Each chapter of this dissertation pays close attention to how expressive culture – particularly fashion, music, and entourages – are utilized as tools that boxers deploy during their ring entrances to perform sporting entitlements. In this introductory chapter, I have introduced the two major arguments that this dissertation will address. First is that boxers – particularly Latinx, immigrant, and Black boxers – are most often the unit of sale, a commodity, and ultimately pawns in a highly commodified, transactional, and unregulated sporting industry and secondly, that boxers at times need to perform resistance in subtle, covert, and disguised ways to remain undetected to not risk securing the possibilities of scheduling future fights and potential financial earnings. I also discussed the theoretical framework that guides my study and the methods I executed to gather data and engage in critical analysis. I provided a thorough discussion on the history and epistemological possibilities of ring entrances as more than just entertainment and as a source of critical examination for the excavation and deconstruction of how fighters deploy expressive culture to perform dissent and resistance in their ring entrances.

Chapter Two, "'You can tell a lot from a fighter by what (s)he's going to rock,'" argues that fashion and style politics are a form of expressive culture that boxers deploy to perform oppositional identities and resistance and dissent to structural injustices and dominant ideologies.

It is through intentional fashion and stylistic choices that boxers can perform sporting entitlements and assert their agency and regain control of their bodies to self-author their identities, lived experiences, and politics during ring entrances. This chapter builds on the scholarship of James Scott, Robin D.G. Kelley, Anthony Macías, Luis Alvarez, and Catherine S. Ramírez whose work engage in the subtle and disguised forms of resistance and the meanings of fashion and style politics found in the zoot suit situated within its proper sociopolitical and historical context. It also builds on the work of Gaye Theresa Johnson and her concept of spatial entitlements which shows how marginalized communities create new collective spaces based on their use of creativity and space. Building on their work, I present an innovative way of examining the sport of boxing to show that boxers creatively use the ring entrance space and fashion and style politics to radically express themselves.

Chapter Three, "'He's scoring his theme," focuses on the music that fighters enter the ring to. I argue that the songs selected are rooted in a fighter's cultural subjectivities, lived experiences, and oppositional identities. These songs serve as a framing device for a fighter's creative expression of the self, political messages they intend to articulate, and disruptions to dominant structures and ideologies. This chapter builds on the work of Shana Redmond and her framing of music as a method and theory of resistance. In *Anthem,* Redmond argues that music is a "complex system of mean(ing)s and ends that mediate our relationships to one another, to space, to our histories and historical moment."[113] She posits that Black anthems construct a "sound franchise," which she argues is an organized melodic challenge used by African descended to proclaim their collectivity and the political agenda that informed their mobilization. Here, I use this idea to situate

[113] Shana L Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 1.

my analysis of what fighters' deployment of music means in relation to their fans and markets as well as the political interventions and claims to sporting entitlements.

Chapter Four, "Una Adrenalina Muy Chingona," focuses on the boxing entourage as a form of accompaniment. Ring entrances are often a public demonstration of the multiple identities of a fighter, making them a rich site of study. Central to these performances of politics, fashion, and identity are the formulation of a boxer's entourage. From the characters and personalities most visible in a fighter's entourage to the process and meaning behind the choices that make them, entourages reveal worlds of history, tradition, politics, and identity. There is no previous scholarship on entourages in sport studies and ethnic studies, yet they are important to interrogate because they are central to ring entrances, and therefore to the performances of a fighter's claims of sporting entitlements. This chapter addresses the limited literature on athletic entourages, the innovator of boxing and sporting entourages, Sugar Ray Robinson, and George Lipsitz's and Barbara Tomlinson's conceptualization of accompaniment. In this chapter, I argue that fighters demonstrate creative agency through the formation and presentation of their entourages during their ring entrances. Entourages are a form of accompaniment that create new social relations, social realities, and cultural and knowledge productions. And finally, chapter five, "Boxing Ring Entrances as Insubordinate Spaces," builds on an oral history I conducted with Kali "KO Mequinonoag" Reis and her May 5, 2018 ring entrance. For minoritized boxers, ring entrances regularly serve as ephemeral performative spaces where they can address social justice issues, disrupt structural and ideological power structures, and creatively reimagine a liberated alternative world.[114] In this chapter, I discuss Reis's intentionally curated ring entrance as an expression of

[114] Rudy Mondragón, "Yo Soy José de Avenal: The Deployment of Expressive Culture in Disruptive Ring Entrances," in *Rings of Dissent: Boxing and Performances of Rebellion,* Eds. Rudy Mondragón, Gaye Theresa Johnson, and David J. Leonard, (Under Review).

her cultural identity that disrupted neoliberal individualism, dominant ideas of racial authenticity, gender politics in boxing, and Indigenous erasure. My framing of Indigenous erasure incorporates Patrick Wolfe's work on settler colonization and what he terms the *logic of elimination*. Wolfe writes that settler colonization is predicated on the displacement of Indigenous peoples from their land, and that in its purest form, "the logic of elimination seeks to replace Indigenous society with that imported by the coloniser."[115] Indigenous erasure is a physical and ideological undertaking that displaces Indigenous society, encourages a destructive occupation of Indigenous territories, introduces reductive Euro-American conceptions of blood-quantum identification, and calls for the assimilation of Indigenous people into white American society in ways that disregard and destroy their native cultural mores.[116] Reis drew upon her lived experiences as a Black Native woman and collectivist sensibilities to create a ring entrance that challenged Indigenous erasure and racial authenticity.

Conclusion

Miles Before the Bell is an intervention that builds on the Chicanx Sport Studies literature and addresses the ongoing void and marginalization of sport within Chicanx Studies literature. This work draws a great deal from the literature situated within the critical paradigm of race and sport, which is a paradigm that theorizes sport as "a site of contestation, resistance, and creative human freedom."[117] Even more marginalized within Chicanx Studies are academic monographs that critically focus on the sport of boxing and its history and social processes of dissent. While the contributions on boxing that I have mentioned above are important to the formation of Chicanx

[115] Patrick Wolfe, "Nation and MiscegeNation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology* no. 36 (1994): 93-152, 93.

[116] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native," *Journal of Genocide Research 8,* no. 4 (2006): 387-409.

[117] Carrington, "The Critical Sociology of Race and Sport," p.384.

and Latinx sport studies, they continue to be limited to academic journals and edited anthologies that situate the study of boxing, and sport in general, under the umbrella of popular culture. Examples of this are the work of Caudwell and Zavala as well as Iber's and Regalado's *Mexican Americans and Sports* reader, which dedicate two chapters to the historical analysis of boxing.[118] This brings me to the next limitation of the ways in which boxing has been studied by scholars of Latinx sports: the vast dominance of historical approaches. This is not a critic but more so an opportunity to think about future directions and the expansion of Latinx sport studies that consists of innovative methodological and theoretical approaches to the study of boxing. Jeffrey Sammons's suggestion to those who study sports history is advantageous here. He states, "the history of African American sport is treated in largely social and political terms even though sport is, in part, a cultural phenomenon. Thus, the cultural dimension must be fully explored and explicated, making sure to analyze internal dynamics and cultural styles."[119] This not only applies to the study of African American sports, but also Chicanx and Latinx sport history due to the rich site for cultural analysis that boxing provides scholars.

The literature on sport that I build on is interdisciplinary and is fluidly connected to the fields of history, sociology, ethnic, African American, Black, Native, Indigenous, Latinx, Gender, spatial, and performance studies. This project is not only an interdisciplinary Chicanx sport intervention, but also an intimate exploration of sport through an ethnic studies lens. I have done this through my careful meditation on the methods I employed for this study as well as the theoretical framework I designed. These also includes methods that draw on history, sociology,

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[118] See Jayne Caudwell, "Girlfight: Boxing Women," *Sport in Society* 11, no. 2/3 (2008): 227-239, Noel Zavala, "'I'm the Mang!': Latino authenticity and subversion in the boxing ring," *Latino Studies* 14, no. 4 (2016): 504-522, and Jorge Iber and Samuel O. Regalado, *Mexican Americans and Sports: A Reader on Athletes and Barrio Life,* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2007).

[119] Jeffery T. Sammons, "'Race' and Sport: A Critical, Historical Examination," *Journal of Sport History* 21, no. 3 (1994): 203-278.

and anthropology and theoretical frameworks that come from the work of political scientists, cultural historians, and ethnic studies scholars. This process speaks to the critical paradigm of race and sport, which is to situate sport in relation to sociopolitical and historical issues of inquiry. For this study, my concern is a history of dissent and to argue the ways in which professional world champion boxers navigate a neoliberal hyper-capitalist and exploitative industry while also trying to express themselves in creative and political ways. This agency that I explore is unique given that I have focused my analysis on a space that has been overlooked for far too long. The ring entrance space is ripe for an interpretive analytical process that draws from an interdisciplinary and ethnic studies repertoire to critically interrogate this sporting topic.

This study examined and discussed over 35 ring entrances.[120] The majority of them were found on YouTube as well as other online platforms like Daily Motion. The ring entrances examined in this study were selected because they specifically speak to the ways Black and Brown boxers demonstrate performances of radical self-expression that disrupt hegemonic forces. I also conducted twenty oral histories and in-depth interviews with some of the professional boxers I identified in the ring entrances. Majority of these took place in Southern and Northern California, Las Vegas, and Rhode Island. There are limitations to this, as I did not interview all the fighters who's ring entrances I analyze in this dissertation. And based on my abilities to reach out to fighters as well as the difficulties that came with the COVID-19 pandemic, I was not able to schedule certain interviews. For example, I was scheduled to present my work in Spain for the Sport and Society Conference. My plan was to travel to England after the conference to interview both Naseem Hamed and Tony Bellew (professional world champion and actor in the film Creed). Furthermore, my interpretations and findings are based on the media data and when possible, oral

[120] For a complete list of ring entrances analyzed in this dissertation, see page 221.

histories and in-depth interviews as well as secondary interviews that I have retrieved of fighters, like Hamed, that have commented to the media about their ring entrances. These ring entrances are also, to an extent, the exception because I have carefully selected ring entrances that contain, in some way, shape or form, narratives of radical self-expression and dissent. I also only focused on world champion boxers. This was intentionally because at that level of a fighter's career, there is a higher likelihood of the availability of video data of their ring entrances. For future studies, it would be important to examine ring entrances beyond mega-event fight shows.

A goal of this project is to build the *rebellious boxing archive.* This archive centers the experiences of boxers and their stories about performing dissent and contributing to large social movements and actions for social justice. As an ongoing methodological intervention, the *rebellious boxing archive* will be helpful for future scholars interested in examining boxing and the ways in which athletic activism and dissent has presented itself in this sporting context. Realistically speaking, this dissertation is only going to scratch the surface. It will take ongoing efforts to collectively build this archive with sport scholars and non-sport scholars alike. The archive is simply a beginning.

Chapter 2: "You can tell a lot from a fighter by what (s)he's going to rock": The Deployment of Fashion and Style Politics in Boxing Ring Entrances

You're in boxing, we're in the sweet science, we're in the greatest sport in the world where you show every bit of yourself as a fighter inside the ring. Whether you give it your all, whether you quit, people will always remember you.

-Fernando "El Feroz" Vargas

The ring walk is your time before you go into the ring, to gather your thoughts, your energy, prepare for war. And people have Macho Camacho, like my father, myself. You want to go in there confident. Dancing, screaming. That is part of you as a person… Get in, feel happy, pumped up, hear the fans screaming. That's a way to pump himself up. To motivate himself. To confirm, "Okay. I'm ready. I got it. It's Macho Time."

-Hector "Machito" Camacho Jr.

Building on the larger argument of this dissertation, which is that expressive culture are powerful tools that boxers deploy during their ring entrances to perform sporting entitlements, this chapter argues that fashion and style politics are a form of expressive culture that boxers deploy to perform oppositional identities and resistance and dissent to structural injustices and dominant ideologies. Central to my argument in this dissertation is that boxers occupy a vulnerable position within a neoliberal, hyper-capitalist, and exploitative sport. The boxing arena as a panopticon turned inside out adds an additional layer to the risk that is involved for fighters to stage political acts of dissent. Not all deployments of fashion and style in boxing ring entrances are clear of their messages of resistance and dissent. Many remain undetected and require a more thorough analysis and reading. Whether they are overt or subversive demonstrations, it is critical to document and analyze because they form part of a history of athletic activism and dissent. Furthermore, it is through intentional fashion and stylistic choices that boxers can perform sporting entitlements and assert their agency and regain control of their bodies to self-author their identities, lived experiences, and politics during ring entrances. Chris Colbert is a good example of this.

Prime Time, Race, and Police Violence

The night of December 12, 2020 was one to remember. Chris "Prime Time" Colbert, a product of Brooklyn, New York, was stepping into the ring to fight for the interim World Boxing Association World Super Featherweight title. There was no crowd inside the Mohegan Sun Arena in Uncasville, Connecticut due to the global pandemic and looming threat of Covid-19. Colbert, like many other fighters to date, took a risk in fighting under precarious conditions. Risk, however, is not rare given that fighters compete in a sport where a single punch can cost them their life. The stage was set as Colbert was the main event fighter who would be the showcase attraction in a Showtime Boxing nationally televised fight. In a moment where ring entrances have shifted given that there are no crowds inside the arenas, boxers have had to adjust to a setting where they cannot engage and feed off the energy and excitement of their fans. It is a different kind of feeling and environment, yet fighters continue to radically express themselves in ways that overcome the situation and circumstance they find themselves in. Colbert's ring entrance from this night, which ran for approximately 60 seconds, demonstrates a fighter's intentional use of expressive culture, and lived experiences to communicate dissent and resistance to the hegemonic forces of institutional racism and racialized violence.

Every single part of Colbert's outfit represented an intentional act filled with personal and political meaning. As ring announcer Jimmy Lennon Jr. announced Colbert's entrance to the ring, the camera's zoomed in on the ring entrance platform runway. Above the platform was a gigantic screen with Chris Colbert's name and photo. Immediately after Lennon's announcement of Colbert's ring entrance, the limited number of spectators in attendance heard the beginning of Maino's 2009 hip hop track "Remember My Name". Designed by Aaron Harrison of the Dayton, Ohio-based boxing uniform designer company "The Body Kit Customs," Colbert's hypervisible

outfit stood out due to the rich pink and white colors that adorned his entire look. In an interview I conducted with Harrison, he stated that Colbert did not want his outfit to be unveiled on social media prior to his fight. As Colbert stepped onto the platform, his boxing outfit was revealed to the public for the first time. The pink and white colors were intentionally selected for the purpose of supporting breast cancer awareness efforts. On his head was a pink traditional Mexican charro that are typically worn by mariachi artists. Without a thorough analysis of this action, fans and media see a Black man appropriating Mexican culture as an act to antagonize.[121] Yet, according to Harrison, Colbert wears a charro to honor his Mexican American trainer Aureliano Sosa, who has been nothing short of a father figure for the young pugilist. Under his charro was a pink face mask with his ring moniker, "Prime Time," embordered on it. His boxing nickname builds on the original Prime Time, former National Football League and Major League Baseball player Deion Sanders. His robe had pink and white stripes and stars, which signified his American identity and U.S. citizenship. The robe stretched down to his knees and had short sleeves. The end of the sleeves and neck collar was laced with elegant white fur. On the back of his robe was the logo for "Prime Time Chicken," a restaurant in Garfield, New Jersey that Colbert, at the young age of twenty-four, owns.

The precise cut for his custom-made boxing trunks is unique in the sense that they are a gladiator style skirt with four pentagon shaped flaps found on the front, back, right, and left side that connected at the waistband. On the front was a large logo of "Prime Time Chicken." Beneath that was "Gold Bar," which might be one of his more financially lucrative sponsors. On the back were about a dozen sponsors. On the right flap was a pink cancer awareness ribbon and on the left

[121] See for example the 2007 fight where Floyd Mayweather Jr. wore a green, red, and white outfit and a Mexican charro sombrero. Home Box Office ring commentators described this act as simply being "gamesmanship" to taunt the crowd.

was a direct message that disrupted white supremacy and racialized police state violence. It read "JUSTICE FOR ALL MINORITIES KILLED THROUGH POLICE BRUTALITY."[122] This powerful and direct message is one of the many examples that exists in the realm of boxing, where fighters will use their outfits to communicate a plethora of messages to make themselves marketable to their fanbases. Some of these narratives, like Colbert's, are also grounded in dissent and resistance to hegemonic forces. When we think about the large audiences, both inside the boxing arenas and those watching on television, that are solely watching a fighter enter the ring, the stylistic decisions boxers make for their ring entrance can function as a form of resistance to their gaze. For example, in *Beyond the Cheers,* C. Richard King and Charles F. Springwood argue that the University of Illinois football stadium, which holds 65,000 people, can be thought of as a panopticon turned inside out.[123] Rather than one person monitoring the bodies and behaviors of many around the perimeter, the thousands in the boxing arena and millions watching on television monitor surveille the actions and political choices made by the boxer at the center of the ring. In the case of this study, it is the monitoring of a fighters' stylistic, musical, and entourage choices that can represent dissent and resistance to the hegemonic forces of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, religion, immigration, and the state.

Examples of the Deployment of Fashion and Style in Ring Entrances

Style and fashion within and outside of the playfield and courts has existed as a site of resistance. In the 1968 Olympic games in Mexico City, Tommie Smith and John Carlos staged a protest during the victory ceremonies following their run in the 200-meter dash. Smith had won

[122] Chris Colbert, "Did I earn my stripes like Adidas ??" Instagram account, @officialprimetime718, retrieved December 26, 2020.

[123] C. Richard King and Charles Fruehling Springwood, *Beyond the Cheers: Race as Spectacle in College Sports* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2001).

gold while Carlos took home the bronze medal. During the ceremony, they used articles of clothing to gesture their orchestrated protest. Smith wore a black right-hand glove while Carlos wore the left of the same pair. The right glove symbolized power in Black America while the left represented the unity of Black America (together they formed a message of unity and power). Smith also had a black scarf around his neck that stood for Black pride. And finally, both men stood shoeless on the victory stand only wearing black socks that stood for protesting poverty in racist America.[124] In 2010, critical sport journalist Dave Zirin reported on the first time that a professional U.S. sport team took on a united political stand as "the entire Phoenix Suns team wore shirts that read *Los Suns* as a statement of solidarity with Latino people in Arizona threatened by the brutal anti-immigrant bill, SB-1070."[125] Most recently, in 2016, members of the Women's National Basketball Association teams, Minnesota Lynx and New York Liberty, collectively protested and demanded justice and accountability for Philando Castile and Alton Sterling, who were both shot and killed by police officers. They did this by wearing black t-shirts that contained the hashtags #BlackLivesMatter and #Dallas5 on the front.[126] And at the French Open in 2018, tennis superstar, Serena Williams wore a black catsuit that disrupted symbolic and fixed meanings of the tennis "dress," a sporting fashion that reinforces acceptable aesthetics of femininity within the sport. Williams's dress was so politically disruptive that French Tennis Federation president, Bernard Giudicelli, called the act as a sign of disrespect to "the game and place."[127] This was not the first time Williams performed dissent in this manner. In 2002, Williams wore a catsuit for her U.S.

[124] Harry Edwards, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

[125] Dave Zirin, "WNBA Teams Show What Black Lives Matter Solidarity Looks Like, "last modified July 11,2016, https://www.thenation.com/article/wnba-teams-show-what-blacklivesmatter-solidarity-looks-like/.

[126] Zirin, "WNBA Teams Show What Black Lives Matter Solidarity Looks Like."

[127] Cindy Shmerler, "Serena Williams Shrugs Off Catsuit Concerns," last modified August 25, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/25/sports/serena-williams-shrugs-off-catsuit-concerns.html.

Open match that garnered a range of reactions from admiration to a disgust that was anchored and informed by ideologies that reproduce a hegemonic racialized order in women's tennis.[128] These are just a few examples of athletic activism and performances of dissent that have taken place across sports through the use of fashion and style politics.

While narrative accounts of activism in the broader sports world proliferate, both in media and academic literature, they are virtually non-existent in boxing. There is currently an analytical and narrative void in the critical sport literature that recognizes the numerous successors of Muhammad Ali who have staged public challenges to myriad forms of oppression. Locating radical forms of self-expression, resistance and activism in boxing requires alternative approaches, interpretations, and analysis of the sport. Ring entrances and the deployment of fashion and style politics is one avenue that scholars can take to examine the rich archive of boxing to excavate narratives like that of "Sugar" Ray Leonard, who in his June 12, 1989 fight against Thomas "Hitman" Hearn, entered the ring wearing a white and red striped robe that contained a subversive message in resistance to structural racism in South Africa. Broadcaster Tim Ryan quickly pointed out the word "Amandla" stitched on the back of Leonard's robe. Ryan incorrectly translated the word by saying Amandla meant "freedom in an African dialect."[129] Not only did he mislead the world on the political meaning of the word, but Ryan also reduced the significance of Leonard's efforts because Amandla is the isiNguni word for *power*.[130] Amandla was used by the African National Congress and its allies as a rallying cry in resistance efforts against apartheid in South

[128] Jamie Schultz, "Reading the Catsuit: Serena Williams and the Production of Blackness at the 2002 U.S. Open," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 29 no. 3 (2005): 338-357.

[129] "Thomas Hearns vs Sugar Ray Leonard II 12.6.1989 – WBC & WBO World Super Middleweight Championships," uploaded by Classic Boxing Matches, July 23, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wIKpP6FTCVg&t=190s.

[130] Lindelwa Dalamba, "Disempowering Music: The *Amandla!* Documentary and Other Conservative Musical Projects," *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* 13, no. 3-4 (2012): 295-315, 312.

Africa. In call and response fashion, "Amandla" would be called out, followed by "Awethu" or "Ngawethu," (to us), which is a South African version of "power to the people."

More than a decade later, "Prince" Naseem Hamed faced Marco Antonio Barrera on April 7, 2001. In a highly anticipated featherweight match that took place in the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas, Hamed used his ring entrance and boxing trunks to express his racial and religious subjectivities. Hamed wore leopard print trunks with "Prince" stitched on the front side and "Islam" on the back. Fighting out of Sheffield, Yorkshire, United Kingdom, Hamed brought into the ring an unapologetic demeanor that resembled many of the characteristics of the late activist boxer, Muhammad Ali. Before the start of their fight, ring commentators described Hamed as "cocky Hamed" due to his claims of being the *best-ever* and described his style as "unorthodox," "unpredictable," "reckless," and "unconventional."[131] Like many fighters, Hamed strategically delayed the start of the fight by rewrapping his hands in his locker room. TVKO ring announcers Jim Lampley and Larry Merchant were growing impatient and described Hamed as a defiant fighter who needed to be disciplined. Hamed entered the boxing ring to "Allah" chants, a performance that shook up the powers and privileges of a white Christian nation. Millions watched as this unapologetic Yemini-English boxer made his way into the ring with the words "Muhammad" to his right and "Allah" to his left printed in the Arabic language on giant banners.

Although Hamed lost to Barrera, what is noteworthy of this event was the fighter's performance of his Brown and Muslim identities. Larry Merchant interviewed Hamed at the end of the fight, who stood proud and maintained his composure after suffering his first professional defeat. Hamed attributed his loss and acceptance of it to Allah and answered Merchant by stating:

> Trust me, this is the way I feel at this moment in time. I'm happy that I've done twelve rounds and come out safe, Allah has led me nice and safe and I've come out

[131] "Marco Antonio Barrera vs Prince Naseem Hamed," uploaded by "ExtraBoxing," May 20, 2013, retrieved April 2, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R6hbiCSAA28.

> well, the fact is I lost the fight, I accept the loss. I accept the loss and I accept it written for me from Allah. That's the way a real fighter and a real man and a real champion goes out. I will return.[132]

These words demonstrate a performance that deviates from the normative scripts of race and religion in the world of boxing. Rather than "thanking God" in the Christian sense, Hamed centered Islam by praising Allah and adorning his spectacular trunks with Islam. Furthermore, as a non-Christian fighter of color who refused to be disciplined by the industry, Hamed's reconciliation of his first defeat in his post-fight interview came in the form of privileging Islam within a sporting context where whiteness and Christianity reign supreme. In other words, even in defeat, Hamed achieves a sense of humanity by "reclaiming 'failure' as a productive site of agency"[133] that goes against dominant ideologies of race, religion, and capitalism.

Shifting from acts of racial and religious dissent, both pro- and anti-immigration statements have also found their way to ring entrances. Oscar De La Hoya serves as an example of a subtle deployment of a headband that communicated a resistance to state violence and anti-immigrant and nativist ideologies. During his ring entrance against Ricardo "El Matador" Mayorga on May 6, 2006, he wore a white headband with the words "NO HR-4437" visibly printed on it. Sponsored by Wisconsin Republican Jim Sensenbrenner, the Border Protection, Anti-terrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 (H.R. 4437) "would have implemented more severe penalties for undocumented presence in the United States, changing it from a civil infraction to a criminal offense, and called for criminal penalties against religious and charitable organizations that provide relief" to undocumented immigrants.[134] More than a decade later, boxing fans witnessed the use

[132] "Marco Antonio Barrera vs Prince Naseem Hamed," uploaded by "ExtraBoxing," May 20, 2013, retrieved April 2, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R6hbiCSAA28.

[133] Judith Halberstam, "Notes on Failure," in *The Power and Politics of the Aesthetic in American Culture,* eds. Klaus Benesch and Ulla Haselstein (Heidelberg: Winter, 2007), 69-90, found in Carrington, *Race, Sport, and Politics,* 130.

of fashion and style to reproduce the racism and nativism associated with the most prominent ideologies of the Trump administration. In April 2018, Pennsylvanian fighter "Lighting" Rod Salka wore boxing trunks with the words "America 1st" printed on the front beltline and a border wall with red and blue bricks below it. Salka wore this anti-immigrant boxing attire as he faced Mexican national, Francisco "El Bandito" Vargas. Claudia Sandoval posits that "Salka's choice in attire functions as a visual expression of white supremacy and racial threat that was meant to mimic the oppression of brown bodies by white bodies."[135] Just as fashion and style can be used by boxers to culturally produce counter-discourses, fighters can also reproduce and amplify dominant ideologies and power structures. As such, the ring entrance serves as a site and optic to examine the function of ring entrances and the ways boxers perform dissent, disruptions, and activism in relation to the sociopolitical context and historical moment they find themselves in.

Literature on Resistance and Style Politics

Resistance and dissent in boxing ring entrances are often elusive like boxers who set subtle and disguised traps throughout the fight to set up an impactful punch. Boxing ring entrances are in a special way like runway shows where fighters have an ephemeral moment, lasting anywhere between fifteen seconds to fifteen minutes, to show the world who they are. As mentioned above with the story of "Prime Time" Colbert, one-way fighters do this is through fashion and stylistic choices. They are more than mere choices, as fighters engage in a process of envisioning, imagining, and expressing their dreams and desires to a designer who collaborates and works with fighters to bring their ideas to life. It is the deployment of fashion and style in boxing ring entrances

[134] Justin D. García, "Rising from the Canvas: Issues of Immigration, Redemption, Gender, and Mexican American Identity in *Split Decision* and *In Her Corner,"* in *Identity and Myth in Sports Documentaries: Critical Essays,* eds. Zachary Ingle and David M Sutera (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 63-78, 72.

[135] Claudia Sandoval, "Promoting Racial Animosity: Fighting in the Service of White Supremacy," in *Rings of Dissent: Boxing and The Performance of Rebellion,* ed. Rudy Mondragón, Gaye Theresa Johnson, and David J. Leonard (Manuscript Under Review).

that catch the attention of fans, who agree with their messages and in powerful ways, see themselves in the fighter. They are intentional acts, at times made to be disguised and subtle, and at other times, as in the case of Colbert, are direct acts of dissent and resistance to dominant ideologies and social injustices. This chapter builds on the scholarship of James Scott, Robin D.G. Kelley, Anthony Macías, Luis Alvarez, and Catherine S. Ramírez whose work engage in the subtle and disguised forms of resistance and the meanings of fashion and style politics found in the zoot suit situated within its proper sociopolitical and historical context. It also builds on the work of Gaye Theresa Johnson and her concept of spatial entitlements which shows how marginalized communities create new collective spaces based on their use of creativity and space. Building on their work, I present an innovative way of examining the sport of boxing to show that boxers creatively use the ring entrance space and fashion and style politics to radically express themselves. These acts of radical self-expression take place in relation to the sociopolitical and historical context that is fluid and open to the unique interpretation of the fighters who express their dissent to structures of power and dominant ideologies through the curation of their boxing attire.

James Scott's canonical text *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990) interrogates discourses of power and resistance. My focus on Scott's work is where he argues that resistance and power is found in the hidden transcript, which he defines as discourse that takes place off stage beyond the direct observation of powerholders. He states that "peasantry, in the interest of safety and success, has historically preferred to disguise their resistance."[136] The strategic resistance of vulnerable populations, Scott contends, is due to their primary goal of remaining undetected. It is in the spaces and locations where marginalized communities exists where infrapolitics can be found and everyday struggles are waged. Scott creatively describes the infrapolitics performed by

[136] James C. Scott*, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 86.

subordinates as being like an infrared ray, meaning that they go beyond the visible end of the spectrum and are invisible in large part by design given their awareness of power. Robin D.G. Kelley applies Scott's concept in his important text *Race Rebels,* where he uses infrapolitics as a method of resistance to center the everyday acts of resistance deployed by the Black working class. For Kelley, infrapolitics and organized forms of resistance are not mutually exclusive and are in fact a partner to public forms of resistance. Kelley demonstrates that these acts of Black working class resistance took place in multiple spaces. For example, Kelley deconstructs the role of jazz clubs for Black working-class people who dealt with grueling low-income wage work, long hours, and racism, stating that "these social sites were more than relatively free spaces in which the grievances and dreams of an exploited class could be openly articulated. They enabled African Americans to take back their bodies for their own pleasure rather than another's profit."[137]

In boxing ring entrances, resistance and dissent is a fluid process consisting of subtle and disguised performances as well as direct acts of opposition. Scott's work argues that resistance is found in the hidden transcript. In boxing ring entrances, the hidden transcript can be found in the conversations between boxer and designer who assist in the making of a politicized outfit. The ring entrance itself contains both hidden transcripts and infrapolitics as well as direct expression of counter-discourse and counter-hegemony. In other words, the ring entrance is a multifaceted and complex space that boxers use to deploy fashion and style politics to perform oppositional identities and politics. Kelley's work in *Race Rebels* is instructive here because boxing and the performance of resistance and activism beyond the great Muhammad Ali is non-existent in the literature. Therefore, to center the contributions to athletic activism, resistance and dissent building

[137] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 45.

on Kelley is critical because this is a project about representation. It expands our understanding about the role of the Black Athlete, agency of Black and Brown contemporary fighters, and creating an important conversation about the ways traditional forms of activism are connected to the sporting entitlements performed by boxers.

Central to my dissertation is the ways boxers use fashion and style politics to perform sporting entitlements during their ring entrances. The literature on the political meanings of the zoot suit found in Black and Chicanx Studies informs the ways in which I conceptualize boxing attire as a form of expressive culture that is deployed with the intent and purpose of allowing boxers to perform their identities, politics, and make themselves marketable and relatable to fans and markets. Robin D.G. Kelley identified zoot suiters as *race rebels* who challenged middle class ethics and expectations and, in the process, carved out a unique generational and ethnic and racial identity that spoke to a refusal to be good and well-behaved proletariats.[138] Kelley makes an important distinction that is important when thinking about political intent, which is often used to dismiss the actions of working-class people and athletes. He states that "while the zoot suit was not meant as a political statement, the social context in which it was worn rendered it so."[139] Luis Alvarez's *The Power of the Zoot* builds on Kelley and argues that the adorning of their body with a zoot suit functioned as a way to challenge "their own dehumanization and creatively found ways to claim dignity, much as defense workers, social activists, and many other Americans did" during World War II in the U.S.[140] The sociopolitical and historical context matters when examining the multiple meanings of fashion and style. Anthony Macías's examination of intercultural style

[138] Kelley, *Race Rebels.*

[139] Ibid., 166.

[140] Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance During World War II* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 235.

politics interrogates the zoot suit during the years of 1935 – 1968 to argue for a multicultural urban civility and Mexican American expressive culture to broadly think and re-think about the Mexican American Generation. He conceptualizes style politics in relation to the sociopolitical context, meaning that "the zoot suit and pachuco/pachuca styles became politicized in a context of police persecution, wartime sensationalism, military and civilian vigilantism, and both working- and middle-class moralizing."[141] Catherine S. Ramírez's *The Woman in the Zoot Suit* centers la pachuca within a historical and cultural landscape and examines new ways of thinking of nationalism, citizenship, gender, sexuality, and resistance culture. Her use of style refers to a signifying practice that was on full display by the zoot subculture's codes via clothing, hair, and cosmetics. By style politics, Ramírez refers "to an expression of difference via style," which propels her study in looking at cultural resistance as a gendered project by pachucas who wore zoot suits. In a sport that does not require their athletes to wear a uniform, boxers have the relative freedom to engage in a form of style and fashion politics on a fight-to-fight bases.

Ring Entrance Style and Fashion as a Form of Self-Expression

In other professional organized sports, athletes need to match and wear the same bottoms and tops as their teammates. Boxing, however, is one of the few sports where the athlete can choose what they wear on a fight-to-fight bases. This allows a fighter to make a statement about their politics and who they are or to sell ad space on their boxing attire to make some additional money. Every boxer, whether they are an amateur or professional fighter, desires that moment where they can walk out to the ring and be seen by thousands of fans in a main event fight. This is what Fernando "El Feroz" Vargas told me when I asked him what the ring entrance meant for him. The ring entrance is an ephemeral space where fighters use fashion and style politics to express

[141] Anthony Macías, *Mexican American Mojo: Popular Music, Dance, and Urban Culture in Los Angeles, 1935-1968* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 63.

themselves in multiple ways. Take, for example, boxers using their attire to communicate what they geographically represent.

> It's just like, clothing is really important, especially where we from. I'm from the Bronx, grew up in the Bronx and I'm in Harlem now, with the store in Harlem now, but fashion has always been a way to express yourself. From the rappers and the early clothing, it influences a lot of stuff and you can tell who someone is by the way they dress. You can tell what they like, you can tell a lot about a person, just look at what they're wearing, you know?[142]

The quote above is from my interview with Angel Alejandro, designer and owner of Double A Boxing in Harlem, New York. As a former amateur boxer, Alejandro understands the needs of the fighters who come to his shop requesting boxing trunks, robes, and boots. Alejandro designs outfits that help fighters stand out and effectively communicate their messages as well as creates boxing attire that is practical and efficient to use during a fight.

In the quote above, Alejandro describes the role that clothing plays in articulating a narrative and story about a person. He draws parallels between hip hop artists and boxers as not only performers but storytellers who use the deployment of fashion, a form of expressive culture, to express themselves. Cindy Serrano is a good example of this, who on May 13, 2017, fought against Iranda Paola Torres in the Coliseo Samuel Rodriguez in Aguas Buenas, Puerto Rico. What is significant about her ring entrance was that the attire she wore, which was designed and crafted by Alejandro of Double A Boxing, declared Puerto Rican pride by drawing on an important Afro-Puerto Rican baseball player. Her outfit consisted of a black, yellow, and white color palette. These were used for her boxing boots, trunks, polo shirts for members of her entourage, and a baseball jacket. The jacket, which she wore in her post-fight interview, contained the logo of the Pittsburgh Pirates on the top left chest region of the garment, a Puerto Rican flag on the top of the left sleeve, and “Clemente” in all capital letters with the number “21” underneath it on the back. This outfit

[142] Angel Alejandro (Owner and designer of Double A Boxing) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, October 2019.

was an homage and tribute to the great baseball player, Roberto Clemente, who tragically died in a plane crash on December 31, 1972, en route to deliver supplies to survivors of the 1972 Nicaragua earthquake. Her trunks had the same number on the front along with an image of Clemente swinging his bat. This outfit not only allows Serrano to express her Puerto Rican subjectivity and roots to the island of Puerto Rico, but also to reinforce a demand about Major League Baseball retiring Clemente's number. Although Clemente's number was retired on April 6, 1973 by the Pirates organization, there is a growing campaign that stresses his number be retired in similar fashion as Jackie Robinson's number 42, which is retired throughout all Major League Baseball.[143] By paying a tribute to the Carolina, Puerto Rico born Afro-Puerto Rican baseball player, Serrano embodies and performs a transnational relationship as a Puerto Rican born and Brooklyn, New York raised boxer. It also demonstrates the creativity of boxers to draw on different signs and symbols and sports that fans can access to understand the messages they intend to communicate.

Like the tributes to athletes across different sports,[144] the outfits some boxers have worn for their ring entrances also draw on previous legends of the sweet science.

> Yeah, and it's an expression of themselves. You know what I mean? It's funny now because I can look at fighters and I'll look at suits that they made and I'm like, "Well he just wanted a suit to look good." But you can always tell the fighters that have a story. You know, if you look at Lions Only, and the lion heads they wear. I don't particularly like that style. It's

[143] "Every team's retired numbers," retrieved January 9, 2021, https://www.mlb.com/news/every-mlb-team-s-retired-numbers-c300753386. Also see Barry M. Bloom, "Campaign To Retire Roberto Clemente's No. 21 Throughout MLB Gains Traction," last modified July 8, 2019, https://www.thepostgame.com/roberto-clemente-21-retire-number-mlb-pirates.

[144] See also Gabriel "King" Rosado, who on March 15, 2019, challenged Maciej Sulecki for the vacant World Boxing Organization International middleweight title in Philadelphia, PA. Rosado hired Angel Alejandro to make him an outfit that displayed his home city of Philadelphia for this match. Alejandro suggested an outfit that paid tribute to the former Philadelphia 76ers basketball player, Julius "Dr. J" Erving. On the night of the fight, Rosado's top and trunks adorned with the colors and replica logo of the Philadelphia 76ers during the era Erving played for the team.

> a costume-y thing. I do like... For example, just last week Josue Vargas, he wore a tribute suit to Hector Camacho.[145]

Here, Alejandro is distinguishing outfits between those he feels can better tell a fighter's story and suits that simply express an exciting spectacle for branding purposes. "Lions Only" refers to twin brother boxers Jermell and Jermall Charlo of Houston, Texas and their promotions and line of merchandise. During his ring entrances, Jermell Charlo has worn a fur robe with a lion's head resting on his head. Throughout the boxing community of this epoch, the Lion has become a symbol closely associated to the Charlo brand of boxing. Conversely, Alejandro describes his preference for suits that pay tribute to boxers of the past. Josue "The Prodigy" Vargas is a 22-year-old boxer who was born in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico and grew up in the Bronx, New York. He has commissioned outfits from Alejandro and the one that stands out for Alejandro is the one that pays tribute to the late Hector "Macho" Camacho. In 1997, Camacho fought the great "Sugar" Ray Leonard wearing white gladiator style boxing trunks with fringes at the ends with a blue old English style font for the initials "MC" (Macho Camacho) printed on the front and backside of his shorts. The trunks that Vargas commissioned from Alejandro looked identical, except for the "JV" initials used for Josue Vargas's name. To design the outfit, Alejandro contacted Maggie Vicente, one of the former designers of Hector Camacho's boxing outfits, for advice on constructing the outfit. Tribute outfits are special because they are a sign of respect as well as a way for boxers to express themselves in ways that show resemblance to fighters of different generations. In Vargas's case, it is a way to perform a contemporary Brown Puerto Rican identity that builds on a boxing icon of the past.

[145] Angel Alejandro (Owner and designer of Double A Boxing) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, October 2019.

A ring entrance and choice in fashion is also a way for fighters to make a statement about their success. Alejandro eloquently speaks from both his experiences as an amateur boxer and current designer for professional boxers:

> It's a statement. The ring walk, as former amateur boxer, not at the professional level, but I've been around pro fighters. I've had pro fighters in my life and from the dressing room to the ring entrance, that is the most terrifying, yet exciting, instance of a fighter's career. Anyone who tells you they're not nervous is lying. Everybody gets nervous walking into the ring. Walking into the ring as a fashion statement, as I want to look my best walking into the ring. That's your time to shine. All eyes are on you from that ring walk. So, it's not surprising that fighters want to look unbelievable while the world is looking at you and a lot of fighters have statements to make and that's how they make their statement. Like what they want to be.[146]

Alejandro here is elaborating on the role a ring entrance can play in a fighter's life. Entering the ring during a nationally televised fight means the level of visibility is magnified. That becomes an opportunity for fighters to demonstrate to the world that they have *made it*, meaning that they are able to communicate a message, in that moment, about escaping from the socioeconomic and violent conditions of poverty. This does not mean that they have generated generational wealth or escaped the violence of poverty entirely. Without verbalizing it, fighters can choose an extravagant suit to gain attention and be seen. It echoes what Tomás Ybarra-Frausto calls *rasquachismo,* which he defines as an attitude or taste that comes from the perspective of the working-class underdog. It is a position rooted in resourcefulness and adaptability but very much focused on an intentional aesthetics. In the boxing world, rasquachismo manifests itself as a sensibility that informs the commissioning of outfits that are stylistically appealing and are not restrained or limited and favor

[146] Angel Alejandro (Owner and designer of Double A Boxing) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, October 2019.

the "elaborate over the simple, the flamboyant over the severe."[147] In other words, a rasquache sensibility is one that consists of bright colors and elaborate and creative designs to be seen.

A theme that emerged from the data is the idea that the curation of a spectacular ring entrance allows fighters to show the world that they have *made it.* Given that majority of boxers have experienced some degree of poverty, the act of accomplishing something in boxing is evidence that a boxer has made something of themselves. The ring entrance is a vehicle for a fighter to make a statement that expresses resiliency despite being up against all odds. Alejandro parallels ring entrances to hip hop artist 2 Pac's famous philosophy of "All Eyez on Me," meaning that the ring entrance is a stage where fighters can demonstrate to the world that they have emerged despite the structural powers and forces of poverty, racism, and exploitation. Hector "Machito" Camacho Jr. for example, described his father's accomplishments as an archetype: "To me, this is a blueprint to success. Cause where we come from, you can't just make it. You got to be special. You're not gonna make it out of Spanish Harlem, and he made it. He came from a no father home, one single parent, the mother. Poor. This reflects the hard work you put into it, you then finally paid off."[148] Here Camacho Jr. explains the degree of poverty and hardship his father experienced. It provides context to the idea of making it despite the obstacles that came with his father growing up in Spanish Harlem in a single parent household during the height of the crack epidemic in New York. On being special, his father was not only great in the ring, but to this day is recognized as an innovator of the ring entrance as a space that a fighter can transform to entertain and radically express oneself.

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[147] Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, "The Chicano Movement/The Movement of Chicano Art," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display,* eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Levine (Washington D.C., Smithsonian Institute Press), 133.

[148] Hector "Machito" Camacho Jr (Professional Boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, March 2019.

Making Your Mark

Boxing is a sport where the stories of fighters' help generate fanbases as well as their market value. The ring entrance itself contains a story about the fighter that lies within a performative spectrum that ranges from the authentic to the most fabricated persona for consumption. In my interview with Mikko Mabanag, marketing manager of American director, producer, actor, and writer Peter Berg's Churchill Boxing in Santa Monica, he stated that what benefits the fighter the most in a ring entrance is their consistency with brand recognition, "making a mark," and keeping "the narrative going."[149] Sarah Banet-Weiser argues that in the contemporary era, brands are about culture as much as they are about economics. Furthermore, Banet-Weiser argues that though brand cultures have the possibility to enhance individual identities, cultural practices, and everyday politics, there is also a process of normativity in brand cultures that "more often than not reinscribe people back within neoliberal capitalist discourse rather than empower them to challenge or disrupt capitalism."[150] When it comes to the use of fashion and style politics, fighters are engulfed in the economic realities of this sport. A fighter needs to market themselves to be relevant to fans and the boxing industry. There is a balancing act that fighters engage in, meaning that they ascribe to this structural reality while also deviating from the normative scripts provided to them by the promoters, managers, and administrator of this sports industry. What does it mean when a fighter uses fashion and style politics to perform oppositional identities? What does a deviation from the normative scripts of boxing look like? What kind of "mark" are boxers trying to make?

[149] Mikko Mabanag (Marketing Manager of Churchill Boxing Gym) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, September 2019.

[150] Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Authentic: The Politics of Ambivalence in Brand Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 221.

In terms of the economies of boxing, fighters can elect to use their boxing outfits to generate additional income. This is, to an extent, similar to NASCAR, in the sense that the stock cars drivers that drive the vehicles during a race are adorned with the logos of multiple sponsorships. However, in NASCAR, the sponsors pay the driver's team, and the team then pays the driver. Additionally, the drivers stay inside their sponsor filled stock car while boxer's stand in the middle of a ring fully exposed using their own bodies to both fight and exhibit the sponsorships. In the context of fighting and sponsorships, Mikko stated, "I might be too savage on this, but boxing is a sport where you can just slap any brand on your shorts and get money out of it."[151] What Mikko is saying here is that boxers have the agency to curate the content found on their boxing attire, which is unique in comparison to other professional sports, where teams wear a uniform. If fighters can find sponsors or businesses that want to advertise through their outfit, then they can set the price for ad space. These figures depend on the return on investment that a business sets for the sponsorship deal and can range from a couple of hundred dollars for up-and-coming fighters, a base five-figure deal for influential fighters with a national reach, and six-figures or more for world champions with a global reach.[152] Raymundo Beltrán is a good example of a fighter with a national reach who made the decision to dedicate the beltline of his boxing trunks, a sought-out area for ad space due to its visibility, to a social justice cause:

> Yeah, yeah you're right, I got offered for that spot, but I put it here. They asked me for that spot… They asked me for this spot right here I said "nah man, I got an honorable thing to do, it's not about the money..." That one, that one paid me ten thousand... But I told them [the] reason why and I couldn't, I told him, look, even if I put [it] on the back, it'll look good because, sometimes they want the front because someone [can] take a picture of the front, but sometimes in the TV, you can see in the back a lot, you know, instead of the

[151] Mikko Mabanag (Marketing Manager of Churchill Boxing Gym) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, September 2019.

[152] Mikko Mabanag (Marketing Manager of Churchill Boxing Gym) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, September 2019.

> front. And I took [a] chance to let it go but they support it because my, my motive, you know. And they like that and still support me you know.[153]

The business that wanted the front beltline ad space on Beltrán's trunks was 4 Sparring, a company that aimed to facilitate the process for amateur and professional boxers and martial arts fighter to find sparring partners to practice with. 4 Sparring accepted the backside beltline ad space on Beltrán's trunks. For Beltrán, the motive behind reserving the front side of his trunks was to honor the lives of the 43 students who went missing from Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico. By attaching the number 43 (Figure A) to the front of his boxing trunks, Beltrán made an intentional declaration in his ring entrance about the ways boxers invite fans to imagine a world where high profile athletes hold state and national governments accountable for corruption, police violence, and transparency.

FIGURE A. Raymundo Beltrán with his boxing trunks worn on the night of November 29, 2014 against Terence Crawford. The 43 was worn to raise awareness of the abducted and disappeared students in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico. Photo by Rudy Mondragón

Beltrán was not the only fighter to deviate from the dominant scripts of the boxing industry by using fashion politics to make a political statement on that November 2014 night. On the undercard was Evgeny "The Mexican Russian" Gradovich, a fighter who is trained by former world champion and accomplished trainer, Robert Garcia. As a Russian nationalist, Gradovich trained in Oxnard, California amongst a predominantly Mexican and Mexican American and

[153] Raymundo Beltrán (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, February 2020.

Latinx cohort of fighters and trainers, hence his ring moniker of "The Mexican Russian." I remember watching Gradovich's fight and being impressed by the courage it took for this man to wear a charro sombrero adorning the number 43 on the front of it. I visited the Robert Garcia Boxing Academy[154] in the summer of 2015 to talk with Gradovich and set up an interview about this ring entrance. After meet and greet pleasantries, I asked Gradovich about the political statement he made in his ring entrance. I was surprised by his response because he said the idea came from his head trainer. Instead of setting up an interview with Gradovich, I decided to sit down and talk with his trainer, Robert Garcia. Regarding Gradovich wearing the 43 on his charro sombrero, Garcia said:

> We could've easily had a sponsor and made a few thousand dollars there. But he was okay with it. He said you know what, that's good, let's do it. I'm the Mexican Russian. So, we did it. It was something big that is still not resolved, so I think for people that seen it, for myself, it just made us proud of doing something like that for [the] students that disappeared without even... Them not knowing they would never come back. They went to protest something but didn't know they were going to disappear. The parents, the families, the friends, they didn't know. That's huge. That was big in the whole country of Mexico, even in the United States, and throughout the world. It was something big. We had to do something about it.[155]

Like Beltrán, Gradovich could have solely sold ad space on his boxing outfit to generate additional income. Different from Beltrán though was that it was Gradovich's trainer who acted and suggested his fighter attach the 43 on his charro sombrero to demonstrate their support for the students. This action correlates and connects to Gradovich's overall branding given that his ring moniker is "The Mexican Russian." This kind of branding, which is also Gradovich's way to make his mark in the sport, is a way for him to become relatable to a Mexican and Mexican American

[154] The Robert Garcia Boxing Academy has since relocated to Riverside, California.

[155] Robert Garcia (retired professional boxer and current trainer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, September 2019.

fanbase. Banet-Weiser states that "brands by definition strive to cultivate relationships with consumers, relationships that have at their core 'authentic' sentiments of affect, emotion, and trust."[156] There is an authenticity that comes with Gradovich's boxing community, which is composed of the Garcia's, a Mexican and Mexican American boxing family. On the one hand, his ring moniker and use of an ethnic affiliation has branding, marketing, and neoliberal capitalist implications. On the other hand, Gradovich is part of a Mexican and Mexican American boxing community that has culturally embraced him as one of their own. The genuineness of the action is reinforced by Garcia's awareness of the sociopolitical injustices taking place in Mexico at that time and advising Gradovich political a statement and sporting entitlement claim. There is a high level of trust involved here because Gradovich believed in Garcia's intentions to make a risky political statement, one that was necessary given that the students had disappeared only two months prior to the night of this fight.

Performances of Racial and Ethnic Identities

Ring entrances offer fighters the unique opportunity to challenge power relationships that often go unchallenged, influence fans, and inform future ring entrance performances by boxers. As mentioned earlier, the ring entrances of Josue "The Prodigy" Vargas and his fashion choices embody a particular kind of memory and tribute to the ring entrance performances of fellow Puerto Rican boxer, Hector "Macho" Camacho. Ring entrances and the fashion choices made by boxers are what Diana Taylor calls the repertoire, which she argues enact embodied memory like "performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing – in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, unreproducible knowledge.[157] In these ephemeral ring entrance moments,

[156] Banet-Weiser, *Authentic,* 214.

[157] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and The Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 20.

fighters demonstrate resistance and a plethora of socially constructed identities that are rehearsed and performed in a public sphere that has global reach. Some of these identities are rooted and performed in opposition to dominant ideologies and power structures. When it comes to performing identities and engaging in student activism, Robert A. Rhoads' posits that a person's sense of identity and connection one has to others has been fundamental to student organizing efforts.[158] Within a boxing and sporting realm, something similar can be said about one's identity being connected to claims of belonging. Justin García, for example, argues that "boxing, indeed sports in general, serves as a site through which Mexican Americans (and members of other ethnic groups) can affirm their identities while claiming a social space for themselves within American life."[159] For boxers, performances of social identities are intimately connected to their messages of dissent and activist efforts as well as claims to joy and dignity and collective affirmation.

According to Benita Heiskanen, "boxers themselves are perfectly aware of their role as entertainers and use the pugilistic podium for various identity performances."[160] An example of this is Fernando "El Feroz" Vargas, who told me that his ring entrances and fashion choices were a way to display how proud he was to be ethnically Mexican and racially brown:

> I was born in the United States and I'm proud, you know to be an American and represent the United States in the Olympics in 1996, but I'm Mexican at heart. I'm proud to be brown. I'm proud of being Mexicano. So, to me, I displayed that with my robes, with the songs that I would come out with, you know, with the Mariachi singing, that's so Mexican, that's so rich in culture and like I said that's me, you know. I was proud to be an American living in the greatest country in the world, but I'm also proud and lucky to be born brown, to be born Mexicano.[161]

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[158] Robert A. Rhoads, *Freedom's Web: Student Activism in an Age of Cultural Diversity* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

[159] Justin García, "Boxing, Masculinity, and Latinidad: Oscar De La Hoya, Fernando Vargas, and Raza Representations," *The Journal of American Culture,* 36, no. 4 (2013), 324.

[160] Heiskanen, *The urban geography of boxing.* 77.

[161] Fernando Vargas (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, March 2019.

Vargas is a good example of the articulation of a subaltern agency that emerges as a reinscription[162] of what it means to occupy a space in between being a Brown Mexican and U.S. born American. He occupies a Chicano identity, which is one that is "consciously and critically assumed and serves as a point of re-departure for dismantling historical conjunctures of crisis, confusion, political and ideological conflict and contradictions."[163] Vargas's participation in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics as a representative of the U.S. has the potential to mark non-white athletes as appropriate ambassadors to whiteness and Americanness. It has happened in the past with boxers like "Sugar" Ray Leonard and Oscar De La Hoya. Yet, for Vargas, his performances of being Mexicano in his ring entrances and more broadly, have communicated an unapologetic and transgressive form of being Mexican that was located outside of the politics of respectability. In other words, Vargas performed a rebellious subjectivity that at times also marked him as a deviant subject. Vargas's fashion politics and performance of being Brown and Mexican were on clear display on the night he fought against De La Hoya in 2002.

On the night of their September 14, 2002 match, Vargas was designated to enter the ring first. Vargas walked with his team, all of which were decorated in robes that adorned the colors of the Mexican flag and the brand "DADA." DADA was a clothing company that started in 1995 by Michael Cherry with only $1,000 and grew to the millions in only three years.[164] This clothing style is associated with gang affiliation and as Aida Hurtado states, such styles have "been declared indicative of a social problem, whether the youth wearing the attire in fact engage in problematic

[162] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

[163] Norma Alarcón 1990, "Chicana Feminism: In the Tracks of 'the' Native Woman," *Cultural Studies* 4 no. 3 (1990): 248-256, 250.

[164] Web Series-Coffee Time with Michael Cherry-Episode 4," uploaded by "Coffee Time," September 22, 2014, retrieved March 5, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJ1zF3_cZYw.

behavior or not."[165] For Vargas, choosing this line of clothing to wear during his ring entrance inside the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino triggered imaginary notions of fear. This was evident in conservative Mexican and non-Mexican fans who regarded Vargas as a "thug."[166] Vargas's decision to also include *La Colonia* on the backside of the waistline of his boxing trunks further fueled the idea that Vargas had ties with gangs. The city of Oxnard was incorporated in the beginning of the 20th century. It was known as a fertile agricultural region where strawberries and lima beans were cultivated. It also has a rich history of Mexican and Japanese immigrant workers joining forces to resist police brutality during the Oxnard Strike of 1903. La Colonia is a barrio in Oxnard that is home to many low-income Latina/o families as well as the space where *La Colonia Youth Boxing Club* once stood. This is where Vargas trained throughout his professional career. Two years after their famous fight, the Oxnard Police Department and Ventura County Sheriff imposed a gang injunction that further targeted, dehumanized, and scapegoated Oxnard community members.[167] By including La Colonia on his trunks, Vargas proudly introduced the world to the barrio that he called home. La Colonia is a space that patrols, stigmatizes, and profiles people of color who fit the description of appearing to belong to the Colonia Chiques Gang. This is not a place to actively represent if one wishes to be accepted as an American ambassador and businessman of the sport. Vargas embraced his sense of home while conservative fans borrowed from popular thug and gangsta tropes, regardless of Vargas's participation in illegal or criminal activity. What Vargas represented was a Chicano identity that proclaimed a sense of self-

[165] Aida Hurtado, "Much more than a butt: Jennifer Lopez's influence on fashion," *Spectator* 26, no. 1 (2006): 147-153, 148.

[166] García, "Boxing, Masculinity, and Latinidad."

[167] Frank Barajas, "An Invading Army: A Civil Gang Injunction in a Southern California Chicana/o Community," *Latino Studies* 5, (2007): 393-417.

determination. His construction of a Chicano identity that intersected with race and ethnicity represented a new way of being and a claim to belonging within an ever-changing United States context that does not always embrace complex representations of being Mexican.

Similarly, my interview with Hector Camacho Jr., a professional boxer and son of Hector "Macho" Camacho, demonstrates how his father embraced his Indigenous roots and brought together a diverse community of Puerto Rican fans. He stated:

> You can see any ring entrance, or any outfit, it meant something to him. What he meant that day, going Indian. He was a chief that day, an Indian. His heritage, he was Taíno, Indian. And the power in the flag I guess, you know. Us Nuyoricans, we happy being Puerto Rican, but we also happy where we come from, New York. It's our own culture. We our own culture, Nuyoricans. We our own- what we've been through. The Puerto Ricans wouldn't accept us, it's like Chicanos. You're not Mexican, you're American. They won't accept you. But when that flag is there, we all one. And that's what I think he in one minute, he let us know that we are one, New York Ricans, Puerto Ricans. I don't care if you're born in Chicago. Chicago-Rican is still Rican. So, you know, during that one minute, everybody feels proud of that flag. Put us together.[168]

Here, Camacho speaks to the intentionality of his father in utilizing outfits that represented his multiple identities and subjectivities. The performances of these identities made Camacho distinct, and it communicated an embracement of his ethnic and regional identities as a Puerto Rican who grew up in Spanish Harlem. Furthermore, Camacho Jr.'s statement that Chicanos of the Southwest and Nuyoricans from the East Coast have a common regional and ideological struggle with identity complicates generalities that posit Mexicans and Puerto Ricans only share a common language, religion, and experience with poverty. Rather, what Camacho is saying is that Nuyoricans and Chicanos embody a hybrid subjectivity that include relationships to home countries and/or colonies where they draw cultural traditions from and at the same time, reside in U.S. states and cities where those cultural traditions are fused and mixed with American cultures. Darrel Enck-Wanzer, for example, defines Nuyorican as a term referring to New York-based Puerto Ricans that

[168] Hector Camacho Jr. (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, March 2019.

captures, in the Benedict Anderson sense, an imagined community that is unique from Puerto Rican's from other regions in the U.S. Nuyorican as an imagined community is an example of a diasporic cultural production that Enck-Wanzer argues has a "tropicalized agency that underwrites cultural citizenship in El Barrio/East Harlem."[169] There is a tension that exists with hybrid identities in the sense that they are subject to scrutinization about the politics of performing racial, ethnic, and cultural dualities. Yet, for the duration of his father's ring entrance, Camacho Jr. argues that the power round in his father's ring entrance was its unifying force. In those brief ring entrance moments, Camacho Jr. asserted, a diaspora of Puerto Ricans from the island and different regions of the U.S. came together as one to cheer on his father. This unification of people, as an imagined community, means that groups are socially constructed and given meaning by the people who see themselves as part of that nation or group.[170] Though the flag of Puerto Rico and Camacho's red, white, and blue outfit were the symbol of their unification, the actual source of this imagined community is "Macho" Camacho himself, who functioned as the connective tissue that made it possible for a diverse group of Puerto Rican's to form a sporting community based on their love and support of a boxer whose oppositional identity performance stimulated a collective pride and joy.

Boxing is a racial project. According to Michael Omi and Howard Winant, race does ideological and political work and "is a concept, a representation or signification of identity that refers to different types of human bodies, to the perceived corporeal and phenotypic markers of difference and the meanings and social practices that are ascribed to these differences."[171] Every

[169] Darrel Enck-Wanzer, "Tropicalizing East Harlem: Rhetorical Agency, Cultural Citizenship, and Nuyorican Cultural Production," in *Communication Theory* 21, no 4 (2011), 344-367, 346.

[170] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Press, 1983).

[171] Omi & Howard Winant, *Racial formations in the United States*, 111.

single boxing match engages in the production of racial formations, which Omi and Winant's define is the process of race making and it's reverberation throughout society. It is a sociohistorical process by which identities of race are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed.[172] On February 22, 2020, Deontay "Bronze Bomber" Wilder staged a ring entrance intervention that centered his Blackness in a powerful way. This performance builds on the legacy of Jack Johnson, who became first Black heavyweight world champion in 1908. Sport sociologist Ben Carrington argues that the invention of the Black athlete and remaking of race took place on that day. Specifically, the Black athlete is a powerful fantasmatic figure that "was the product and perhaps the logical end point of European colonial racism" and its constitutive parts like preexisting and centuries old racial folklores, religious stories, and racist nineteenth century scientific narratives.[173] Part of Johnson's power was his unapologetic way of being in a turn of the century Jim Crow U.S. context. For example, Theresa Runstedtler has discussed the Black dandyism of Johnson as an intervention of political rebellion that went against racial and sexual norms of the Victorian era.[174] Dandyism, within this historical context, is a matter of style and the use of physical appearance by marginalized and subordinated groups to make claims for dignity and pride. For Wilder, his ring entrance outfit from his February 22, 2020 fight builds on the rich expressive culture tradition of utilizing fashion and style politics to make claims of differential belonging and counter-cultural citizenship. The outfit he wore on this night was created by couture designers Cosmo Lombino and Donato Crowley. These fashion artists combined their expertise as couture designers and blended it with the vision Wilder provided them for the creation of his outfit. Lombino and

[172] Ibid.

[173] Carrington, *Race, Sport and Politics*, 1.

[174] Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner*, 149.

Crowley created an outfit that they describe as an example of "Warrior Couture," which functions as a cultural text that I analyze in relation to and situated within a context of Black Lives Matter activism, rising anti-Blackness racism, and heightened police brutality and killings during the Donald Trump era.

Valued at $40,000, Wilder's custom-made "Warrior Couture" outfit, mask, and king's crown were designed and crafted by Lombino and Crowley of the Melrose, California boutique "Cosmo & Donato." The outfit, mask, and king's crown were imagined by Wilder and described in detail to Lombino and Crowley, who played a key role in creating an outfit that would allow Wilder to communicate a Blackcentric message and pay homage "to a lot of the men and women that paved the way for us, this is Black History Month as well and I'm just going to be paying tribute to that."[175] Throughout the promotion of this highly anticipated rematch, Wilder made sure to inform the media that his ring entrance would be something fans could remember him by. More than mere entertainment, Wilder's ring entrance and custom-made outfit were carefully curated. His outfit, mask, and king's crown were made in all black and contained thousands of crystals and rhinestones, a chest plate with his logo, skulls on his right and left shoulders, and red LED lights glowing around his eyes. According to Donato, every piece in the outfit contained a specific meaning:

> The crown is because he's a king. The skull is because he's a warrior, this was all about a warrior here, and we wanted to make sure that the Bronze Bomber was represented in all that he is, and all the greatness that he really truly is. And so that- every outfit is a warrior moment. Obviously, he's going to war, but we wanted to keep elevating those looks and give- and also, you know, it's not just the Bronze Bomber, but it's everybody watching. We want to give them something to see too. We want to give them something to look forward to, a design to look forward to and to think, what are they going to do next?[176]

[175] "Deontay Wilder Dropped $40K on Walk-Out Costume… For Fury Rematch, TMZ," last modified February 22, 2020, https://www.tmz.com/2020/02/22/deontay-wilder-tyson-fury-boxing-rematch-walk-out-costume/.

[176] Donato Crowley (couture designer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón and Ise Lyfe, March 2020.

By commissioning his suit with Cosmo and Donato, Wilder was able to walk to the ring in an outfit that reflected his Blackness and honored iconic and historical Black figures that came before him. The suit also echoed a visual representation of a superhero, with the purpose of being seen and to captivate audiences. This is important because it demonstrates Wilder's use of his body and utilization of visibility to make claims to sporting entitlements and the humanity of Black people everywhere. It is an example of employing a "body politics of dignity," which Luis Alvarez defines as the use of Black and Brown bodies to resist and confront the denial of their dignity due to their bodies being discursively constructed as dangerous and criminal.[177] This deployment of body politics of dignity takes place within the context of police brutality in the U.S. where Black Americans, who account for less than 13 percent of the U.S. population, are killed at more than twice the rate for White Americans.[178]

FIGURE B. Deontay Wilder in his warrior couture outfit designed by Donato Crowley and Cosmo Lombino worn on the night of his February 22, 2020 against Tyson Fury. Photo by Al Bello/Getty Images

[177] Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot.*

[178] "957 people have been shot and killed by police in the past year," last modified July 14, 2021 https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/investigations/police-shootings-database/.

The fighters I have discussed in this section all perform oppositional identities of race that challenge the hegemonic forces that are structured by racism. Through the deployment of fashion and their stylistic choices, fighters demonstrate intentionality and agency. This happens despite participating in a sporting industry that views them not as human but as commodities that are valuable if they are able to fuel the capitalist machine found within this business. Fighters not only navigate this material reality but also negotiate their performances of rebellion in relation to the sociopolitical and historical moments they find themselves in.

Resistance to Anti-Immigrant Racism

Up to this point, I have analyzed and discussed ring entrance performances and emerging themes of self-expression, self-marketing and branding, and constructions of racial and ethnic identities. This section will look at how fighters have used ring entrances to make political statements and engage in subtle, yet clear manifestations of athletic activism. This is not to say that previous examples of fighters and their ring entrances are not making political statements. They are as their deployment of fashion and style politics are rooted in the performance of oppositional identities that challenge different structures of power and dominant ideologies. What follows in this section are examples of ring entrances that clearly disrupt the structures of immigration and citizenship, sexuality, and violence against Indigenous people.

Alfredo "El Perro" Angulo López is a boxer who was born in Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico on August 11, 1982. Angulo represents a boxer's awareness of their role as entertainers who use their pugilistic podium for various identity performances.[179] Specifically, Angulo has used fashion as a tool to perform an oppositional identity against structural forces of U.S. immigration laws and anti-immigrant nativist ideology. On January 18, 2012, Alfredo voluntarily entered the

[179] Heiskanen, *The urban geography of boxing,* 77.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Service Processing Center in El Centro, California to resolve issues with his expired work visa. This was not an easy time for Angulo as two months prior, James Kirkland defeated Angulo by technical knockout in the sixth round of their fight. Defeat is something fighters struggle with in isolation. Defeat can be traumatic and trigger a plethora of emotions and feelings, especially if the defeat is sustained by being brutally knocked out in front of thousands of fans. Angulo was originally told that he would need to stay at the detention center for a couple of days. A couple of days turned into over seven months of detainment. In an interview with Max Boxing, Alfredo discussed his experience in the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Detention Center. Angulo stated, "they say this is not a prison, they say it's a detention center. I don't see the difference between a prison and the detention center I find myself in."[180] He recalls his first days in the detention center and an interaction he had with the director of the facility. "I was detained for seven months because my visa expired," Angulo explains, "after the third day, the director of the facility told me that he was never going to let me out. The process was long and hard for me."[181] This experience had a profound impact on Angulo. Not only did it prevent him from making money to provide for his family, but it also pushed him to use his platform as a boxer to raise awareness about immigration reform.

On the night of June 8, 2013, Alfredo Angulo stepped into the ring against Afro-Cuban boxer, Erislandy Lara. This fight was televised through ShowTime Sports and was the primary undercard bout that took place in Carson, California. Being the primary undercard bout meant it was the penultimate fight of the night and would be televised for a global audience. For his ring entrance, Angulo wore black boxing trunks that read "Immigration Reform Now!" on the backside.

[180] "Alfredo Angulo interviewed at ICE detention center," uploaded by MaxBoxing, July 28, 2012, retrieved December 16, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_AcX366Bu1M.

[181] "Alfredo Angulo interviewed at ICE detention center.".

Gaye Theresa Johnson describes the current moment we find ourselves in as one in which "anti-immigration policies, economic restructuring, and the prison-industrial complex have come together in teeth-gritting harmony to severely curtail the freedom and mobility of black and brown people."[182] The curtailing of freedom and mobility for immigrant communities was the focus of Angulo's actions on this night. In wearing boxing trunks that called attention to immigration reform, Angulo employed a strategy of "spatial entitlement that requires an alternative understanding and construction of the meaning of citizenship."[183] Angulo's strategy is powerful because of the location he executed it in. This fight took place in Carson, California, a city located in Los Angeles County. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, Los Angeles County is home to nearly 900,000 undocumented immigrants.[184] In 2012 alone, the year in which Angulo spent seven months in detention due to an expired work visa, the U.S. apprehended 671,327 and deported a total of 646,684 undocumented immigrants.[185] Given this context, Angulo's actions clearly display a resistance that is rooted in a lived experience that issues a challenge to the structures of power in the U.S. that create dehumanizing laws that exclude and exploit undocumented immigrant communities.

While Pero Angulo staged his intervention during the Barack Obama presidency, which saw [insert stat about deportations], the presidency that followed informed performances that both reinforced and resisted Donald Trump's anti-immigrant politics. Trump formally announced his

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[182] Johnson, *Spaces of conflict, sounds of solidarity*, 160.

[183] Ibid.

[184] Laura Hill and Joseph Hayes, "Undocumented Immigrants in California," *Public Policy Institute of California* (2017) http://www.ppic.org/main/publication_show.asp?i=818.

[185] Muzaffar Chishti, Sarah Pierce, and Jessica Bolter, "The Obama Record on Deportations: Deporter in Chief or Not?" *Migration Policy Institute* (2017) https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/obama-record-deportations-deporter-chief-or-not.

candidacy for President of the United States in June 2015. Staged inside the Trump Tower in Manhattan, Trump introduced his "Make American Great Again" (MAGA) campaign slogan as well as unleashed a racist nativist speech that overtly villainized and dehumanized undocumented immigrants from Mexico. Trump stated:

> When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.[186]

Through a fusion of liberal activism and strategic marketing, Top Rank boxing promoter Bob Arum created the "No Trump" undercard matches as part of the Home Box Office (HBO) pay-per-view program that set up the main event bout between Manny Pacquiao and Timothy Bradley on April 9, 2016. The "No Trump" undercard was made up of three Top Rank signed fighters: Mexican nationals, Gilberto Ramírez and Oscar Valdez and U.S. born Mexican José Ramírez. In a Fox Sports article, Arum commented on the impact of this event, stating, "the more Donald Trump supporters I alienate, the prouder I am. I know who he's appealing to, and if they're his supporters, let them stay home and not buy my fight."[187] As a liberal activist and businessman, Arum took a strong political stand against Trump that also served as a catchy way to get fans to pay attention to the Pacquiao and Bradley fight, which media pundits said was proving to be a tough sell.[188] In particular, José Ramírez saw an opportunity to make his own political statement during the promotion of the "No Trump" card and told the media that he was troubled by Trump's

[186] "Full text: Donald Trump announces a presidential bid," last modified June 16, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/06/16/full-text-donald-trump-announces-a-presidential-bid/.

[187] "Bob Arum's 'No Trump' undercard carries a message with a punch," last modified March 24, 2016, https://www.foxsports.com/boxing/story/bob-arum-s-no-trump-boxing-card-sending-his-message-about-donald-trump-032416.

[188] "Bob Arum's 'No Trump' undercard carries a message with a punch."

plan to build a giant wall and deport millions of undocumented immigrants. He also declared that he was "not going to just ignore it. I want to use this fight to deliver a message. If we ignore it, obviously he might get away with what he wants."[189] Ramírez kept his word as he continued to build on the momentum generated from the "No Trump" card to his eventual fight with Amir Imam in New York on March 17, 2018. This would be the most important fight of his career as it was his first championship title bout in the Donald Trump presidential era. It was also the first time that Ramírez officially dedicated one of his fights to immigration reform as he wore a red hat during a press conference that read "Pro-Immigrant and Proud." He went on to win that fight, becoming the World Boxing Council (WBC) World Super Lightweight champion.

Less than a month later, Pennsylvanian fighter "Lighting" Rod Salka made a statement of his own. Different from Ramírez however, it was in support of Trump's anti-immigrant ideology. On April 12, 2018, Salka entered the ring wearing boxing trunks with the words "America 1st" printed on the front beltline and a border wall with red and blue bricks below it. Salka wore this anti-immigrant boxing attire as he faced Mexican national, Francisco "El Bandito" Vargas. Claudia Sandoval posits that "Salka's choice in attire functions as a visual expression of white supremacy and racial threat that was meant to mimic the oppression of brown bodies by white bodies."[190] It is worth noting that fights like this, where a binary opposition of good and evil, in this case, white nationalism/Latino threat, are presented, the results mean something. When Jack Johnson or Joe Louis won matches, their victories inspired hope and dignity for Black Americans. Similarly, when Vargas stopped Salka in the sixth round, his victory represented a material

[189] Ibid.

[190] Claudia Sandoval, "Promoting Racial Animosity: Fighting in the Service of White Supremacy," in *Rings of Dissent: Boxing and Performances of Rebellion,* ed. Rudy Mondragón, Gaye Theresa Johnson, and David J. Leonard (Manuscript Under Review).

resistance to an anti-immigrant ideology that this white fighter was trying to amplify. In losing to Vargas, one journalist stated, "Rod Salk lost fights to both Francisco Vargas and dignity tonight as Vargas forced a corner stoppage."[191] Twitter also responded to the successful win of the brown bodied Vargas. @unsanghi wrote, "Vargas the Mexican beating Salka the racist MAGA punk to a pulp. A boxing match made in heaven. #MAGA #vargassalka #americafirst." Bishop Talbert Swan described it as "A #MAGA BEATDOWN" Though some fans remarked on the brutality of the fight, most prominent, however, was the direct commentary and collective response about the political significance of Vargas' victory in relation to the racist and xenophobic rhetoric embodied by Trump.

Ramírez's first defense of his WBC title took place five months after Salka's pro-Trump ring entrance. Staged on September 14, 2018 in his home region in the Central Valley of California, the Save Mart Center in Fresno was packed with a crowed of 11,102. Given that Ramírez was the champion, he entered the ring second. His ring entrance lasted no more than 90 seconds yet consisted of multiple deployments of expressive culture that coincided with his pro-immigrant and proud message. Seated in the media section of the arena, I witnessed Ramírez and his entourage wait patiently at the edge of the tunnel that bridges the dressing rooms to the boxing ring. His entourage consisted of famed boxing trainer Robert Garcia, his manager Rick Mirigian, younger brother, and the Fresno Fuego soccer team mascot. Chuy Jr. was also part of his entourage, playing the important role of composer and singer of Ramírez's ring entrance music.

For his ring entrance, Ramírez, Robert Garcia, brother, and two others wore black shirts that read "Pro-Immigrant and Proud," which proclaims an oppositional message to the current anti-immigrant actions, like the rescinding of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA),

[191] Patrick L. Stumberg, "Francisco Vargas Smashes Rod Salka in six," last modified April 12, 2018, https://www.badlefthook.com/2018/4/12/17232756/francisco-vargas-smashes-rod-salka-in-six.

spearheaded by the Trump Administration. To accompany the shirts worn by Ramírez and his team, three members of his entourage wore refashioned red hats that shared a resemblance to the infamous Donald Trump MAGA hats that were used during his presidential campaign. Instead of MAGA however, their red hats had the words "Pro-Immigrant and Proud" sown in white and blue on the frontside with Ramírez's JCR logo on the bottom right, serving as a stamp of approval to his political message. Ramírez defines pro-immigrant and proud as a statement of

> Who we are, that's my team. We're pro-immigrant and proud to be. And that's the overall message that I want to give out to those who have an idea towards immigrants. For those who like to divide people. Because when people are divided, they're less powerful. So, to be reminded that they should be proud that they're immigrants and they come here and are doing something positive.[192]

The pro-immigrant and proud message that Ramírez communicates is a direct manifestation of a sporting entitlement because of his deployment of fashion and style to convey a politics of dissent to the anti-immigrant structures of the moment. This stylistic choice is rooted in difference and in opposition to nativist sentiment. It speaks to how Catherine S. Ramírez conceptualizes the style politics of the zoot suit, which she situates in a wartime moment where Pachuca's performed resistance via stylistic choices. In this case, Ramírez's political message with the shirts and hat are both to empower immigrants as well as disrupt anti-immigrant ideologies that dehumanize non-white subjects and prevents the design and implementation of comprehensive immigration reform.

Resistance to Homophobia

Boxing is a predominantly heterosexual and hypermasculine sport. Yet, within this sporting context, fighters have also staged interventions in their ring entrances that center their gender and sexual subjectivities in relation to the violent structures that inform gender-based violence and homophobia. On October 4, 2012, Puerto Rican boxer, Orlando "El Fenomeno" Cruz

[192] José Carlos Ramírez (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, January 2019.

proudly informed the Associated Press, "I have and will always be a proud Puerto Rican. I have always been and always will be a proud gay man."[193] After this historical moment in boxing, Cruz was regarded as the first professional boxer to come out and announce his sexual identity as a non-heterosexual male fighter. Retired boxer and accomplished boxing trainer, Robert Garcia, talked about the courage Cruz displayed by saying, "it takes heart and balls to come out and say that, so I give him props for actually coming out like that… my respects to him."[194]

After Cruz came out, he went on to win back-to-back matches, earning him an opportunity to face Orlando "Siri" Salido for the vacant World Boxing Organization Featherweight title. Although his fight with Salido was not the main event, it was nonetheless scheduled as an undercard in a popular pay-per-view event featuring Timothy Bradley Jr. and Juan Manuel Marquez. Inside the Thomas and Mack Center in Las Vegas were 12,000 fans and 375,000 reported pay-per-view buys, meaning there was a captive audience with global reach that witnessed Cruz's sporting entitlement on this night.[195] On the night of his fight, Cruz walked to the ring blasting Frankie Ruiz's "Puerto Rico," a song that expresses a sense of pride towards a Puerto Rican subjectivity. As he entered the ring to Ruiz's soundscape, he not only declared himself as an empowered Boriqua, but also openly displayed his sexuality through the selection of his boxing trunks, adorning a hybrid Puerto Rican and Rainbow flag. Cruz's robe was blue with pink trim on the sleeveless ends and in the middle where his robe's zipper was located. His last name, "Cruz" was printed on the right side of his robe, with the letter "C" on top followed by "RUZ" below it.

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[193] Dan Rafael, "Orlando Cruz a 'proud gay man,'" last modified October 4, 2012, https://www.espn.com/boxing/story/_/id/8460484/puerto-rican-featherweight-orlando-cruz-comes-proud-gay-man.

[194] "Robert Garcia on Orlando Cruz the gay boxer," uploaded by ESNEWS, October 9, 2012, retrieved December 16, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shGxfU3lpUU.

[195] Ryan Bivins, "Timothy Bradley-Juan Manuel Marquez reached 375,000 PPV Buys According to Top Rank President Todd duBoef," last modified November 5, 2013, http://www.badlefthook.com/2013/11/5/5068162/timothy-bradley-juan-manuel-marquez-reached-375000-ppv-buys.

On the left was the boxing brand Everlast logo. On the bag of his robe was the Puerto Rican flag. Instead of the traditional red, white, and blue, the Puerto Rican flag had the rainbow colors that are found in rainbow flag. His trunks were similarly constructed, as the front beltline had the Everlast logo and on the back was Cruz's last name. The front and back of his trunks, which were cut like a gladiator skirt with a slight cut on the sides that revealed Cruz's thighs, had the same hybrid Puerto Rican and Pride Flag. His ring entrance ran for 67 seconds, yet in that short amount of time, Cruz transformed a space that has historically been framed as a heterosexual space where display of macho bravado and hyper-masculine articulations of sexuality are normalized.

The power of Cruz's ring entrance is the political meaning of the space he disrupts as well as the meaning found in the hidden transcript of this fight. In describing spatial entitlement by Black and Brown youth in the 1950s and late 1960s, Johnson states, "spatial articulations in this era refer to the transformation of the ways in which people moved themselves through space, shaped the spaces where they congregated, and asserted their entitlements with the cultural currency they created."[196] For his fight with Salido, Cruz dedicated the bout to U.S. Virgin Islander from Saint Thomas, Emile Griffith. In 1961, Griffith was scheduled to take on Benny "Kid" Paret in a highly anticipated rematch. At the weigh in prior to their championship fight, one of Paret's corner men called Griffith a "maricon," a hateful remark regarding his rumored sexuality. Noel Zavala suggests that "Griffith's subdued performance may have also resulted from being shaken up at the weigh-in."[197] Griffith was a six-time world champion who in 2005, revealed to *Sports Illustrated* that he was bisexual.[198] Griffith died in July 2013, months prior to Cruz's match with

[196] Johnson, *Spaces of conflict, sounds of solidarity: Music, race, and spatial entitlement in Los Angeles*, 65.

[197] Noel Zavala, "'I'm the Mang!': Latino authenticity and subversion in the boxing ring," *Latino Studies* 14, no. 4 (2016): 504-522,

[198] Donald McRae, "Orlando Cruz: 'I'm gay, but I'm also a boxer. This is my time,'" last modified October 11, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2013/oct/11/orlando-cruz-gay-boxer-world-title.

Orlando Salido. And like Griffith, Cruz has also had experiences of enduring anti-gay slurs from a fellow boxing sparring partner. Recognizing these similarities between Griffith and himself, Cruz told Donald McRae of *The Guardian* that he would be dedicating his fight against Salido to the memory of Emile Griffith:

> I'm fighting for my family, my trainer, my team, everyone who wrote to me around the world since I came out, as well as the lesbian-gay-bi-transgender community. They all brough grains of sand to the dream I've built. But I want to dedicate this fight to Emile Griffith. He had to live with the stigma of being black when there was such prejudice. And he was gay. He suffered from double prejudice – and the second was even worse because he kept it secret so long. He was a brave man, and a great champion, and so I want to win the world title for Emile.[199]

In sharing who he is fighting for, Cruz uses his cultural currency as a boxer to add meaning to his fight with Salido and his claim to sporting entitlements in his ring entrance. This dedication also shows Cruz's consciousness to the intersections of subjugated racial and sexual subjectivities.

As an Afro-Puerto Rican gay man, Cruz embodies Miriam Jiménez Román's and Juan Flores's use of W.E.B. Du Bois idea of "triple-consciousness." Jiménez Román and Flores state that the historical and contemporary experiences of U.S. Afro-Latin@s includes their three-ness – "a Latin@, a Negro, and American: three souls, three thoughts, three unreconciled strivings; three warring ideas in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."[200] For Cruz, this idea of triple-consciousness, as used by Jiménez Román and Juan Flores, also includes the intersection of gender and sexuality. Though not explicit in his dedication, Cruz and Griffith are similar in the sense that both are Afro-Caribbean gay men who, despite fighting in different eras, were/are subjected to the hegemonic forces of race, gender, and sexuality. Cruz's dedication in *The Guardian* complicates rather than essentializes ideas of color lines because he

[199] McRae, "Orlando Cruz: 'I'm gay, but I'm also a boxer. This is my time.'"

[200] Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores, "Introduction," in *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States,* eds. Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1-15, 15.

makes salient the struggles associated with Blackness and queer subjectivities. By making this intersection visible in his statement, Cruz resists the legacies of colonialism and neo-imperialism. Ana M. Lara posits that due to these legacies as well as whitening bias of Latinidad and the invisibility of Afro-Latina queer identities, claiming an Afro-Latina lesbian identity embraces her "choice to exist, which comes with the necessary act of reflecting on my own complicities with and challenges to the current economic, political, and social order."[201] Cruz too chooses to exist and in articulating Griffith's suffering from "double prejudice," he engages in a discourse that disrupts the current social order of race, gender, and sexuality by articulating a consciousness about the existing struggles that come with this way of being.

Conclusion

Expressive culture is a powerful tool that boxers deploy during their ring entrances to perform sporting entitlements. This chapter has argued that fashion and style politics are a form of expressive culture that boxers deploy to perform oppositional identities and resistance and dissent to structural injustices and dominant ideologies. Not all boxing pundits and media critics agree with how elaborate ring entrances have developed over time. Boxing trainer and commentator Theodore "Teddy" Atlas has spoken about the lost art of the ring entrance and their entanglement with self-celebration and capitalism:

> The ring walk in boxing is part of a tradition, two fighters taking a short but long journey to a place that's dangerous and dark. That's lost now. It's not about introspection or history or tradition anymore. It's about self-celebration and how sensational can we make it. Ring walks today look like a Grammy Awards show because the people who run things have decided that's the way to generate more

[201] Ana M. Lara, "Uncovering Mirrors: Afro-Latina Lesbian Subjects," in in *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States,* eds. Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 298-313, 300.

> money. That's the economic reality of the situation, and it doesn't matter whether I like it or not.[202]

With a limited perspective like this, it makes it easy to lose sight of the complexities and multiple meanings and narratives that are embedded in a ring entrance. Boxing traditionalists want the ring entrance to be simply a space where a fighter can have their final moment of preparation before they engage in battle. Atlas is correct when it comes to his comment about how ring entrances can be used to generate more money. This can be seen recently when Saul "Canelo" Alvarez walked into the ring. As he made his way to the ring, a graphic appeared on the bottom left-hand corner of the screen that read "RING WALK SERVED BY HENNESSY" accompanied by the company's logo.[203] This type of ring entrance does raise questions about the extent that corporations may have influence and impact in the ways in which ring entrances are curated by fighters. This is especially the case if the fighter is sponsored by or endorses a product, which in Alvarez's case, he does.

Nonetheless, the ring entrance is a space where fighters can enact their creative agency through the deployment of fashion and style politics. Angel Alejandro for example, created a boxing outfit for Kali "KO Mequinonoag" Reis (Reis's ring entrance will be the focus of chapter 5) that centered a social justice issue directly related to her subjectivity as a Two Spirit Black Indian woman:

> [She had] a conscience statement, [she] wanted to talk about the women that are being killed in [her] community, as Kali Reis is talking about, and she wears all red in honor of them. You know, so, it's your statement and you're going on a stage. It's your ring entrance, it's a fashion statement. You can tell a lot from a fighter by what (s)he's going to rock when (s)he walks in.[204]

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[202] Quote by Teddy Atlas found in Thomas Hauser, "The evolution of the ring walk: key moments that changed boxing introductions forever," last modified November 14, 2018, http://www.sportingnews.com/us/boxing/news/greatest-boxing-ring-walks-music-evolution/xjbud3xfr2bx18ti7r4g8kzpy.

[203] "Canelo's EPIC Cinco de Mayo Themed Ring Walk", uploaded by DAZN Boxing, May 8, 2021, retrieved May 13, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cOLMheVxzZ8.

[204] Angel Alejandro (Owner and designer of Double A Boxing) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, October 2019.

Here, Alejandro is alluding to Reis, who has Seaconke Wampanoag, Cherokee, and Nipmuc heritage as well as Cape Verdean heritage. Based out in Providence, Rhode Island, Reis commissioned Alejandro to create an outfit that would allow her to politically express an issue of injustice. She entered the ring on June 30, 2018 wearing an outfit that had the acronym "MMIW" printed on her red sleeveless robe and centered on the front of her gladiator style trunks. MMIW, which stands for Missing Murder Indigenous Women (or Womxn, Girls, and Two Spirit), is a movement that addresses an epidemic that sees four out of five Native women affected by violence and the legacy of violence and murder against Native women and children that dates to Spanish and Euro-American invasions of Native lands and their sacred bodies.[205] Reis is a good example of what Alejandro states when he says that we can tell a lot about a fighter based on what they wear to the ring. In Reis's case, it is to amplify a social justice issue. For some, it is a demonstration of visibility and claims to dignity with a fun and flamboyant outfit that brings them and their fans an immense amount of joy during a short - yet ephemeral - ring entrance moment.

[205] "MMIWG2S," Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women, retrieved January 12, 2021, https://www.csvanw.org/mmiw/.

Chapter 3: "He's Scoring His Theme": Deployment of Music in Boxing Ring Entrances

And the all-time best ring entrance music. [Mike Tyson] would come out to one note. One ominous note. There's no song playing. It's like a, 'duuuun.' For him to even come up with that. Cause you're the one that says, 'I want my music to be…' For him to go, 'just give me one solid, one solid note.' And that shit would make you feel like a monster was coming in the room. 'Booooooom.'

-Eddie Murphy[206]

Boxing is an art form, and the sport of boxing is a theater. In all story telling, you have to have music, you know. You can't have a film without no music, you know what I mean. You know music is the personification of the emotions, you know that the director and a story wants to get across. So, when a fighter is directing his story in that moment, he's scoring his theme.

-stic.man of dead prez[207]

In this chapter, I argue that fighters' musical selection for their ring entrances are rooted in their cultural subjectivities, lived experiences, and oppositional identities. These songs serve as a framing device for a fighter's creative expression of the self, political messages they intend to articulate, and disruptions to dominant structures and ideologies. For José Ramírez, his ring entrance from his September 14, 2018, fight deployed a live performance of "Yo Soy José de Avenal" by Chuy Jr. that intersected with his "Pro-Immigrant and Proud" political message that was intended to challenge the nativist and racist Trump administration. This is just one of many examples that demonstrate the ways that fighters curate ring entrances and use them to claim sporting entitlements.

"It's pretty intense, huh?" José Ramírez told me as we sat a few feet away from each other on the day of our interview. He was responding to a video I asked him to watch on my iPad. The video was of his ring entrance from his September 14, 2018 fight, which took place at the tail end

[206] *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee*, season 11, episode 1, "Eddie Murphy: I Just Wanted to Kill," featuring Jerry Seinfeld and Eddie Murphy, aired July 19, 2019, Netflix.

[207] Khunum Muata Ibomu aka. stic.man (Hip Hop Artist and Activist) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón and Ise Lyfe, March 2019.

of a warm summer season. The intensity Ramírez described is from all the fans who were cheering him on as he and his entourage waited for the music to que their descension to the ring. The Save Mart Center was filled with 11,102 boxing fans, the great majority who were there to watch Ramírez, the hometown hero, defend his World Boxing Council World Super Lightweight title. As soon as he finished watching the footage, Ramírez noted a few things that stood out to him. First, the intensity of the moment and how the energy of the crowd excited him for the fight. Second, his ability to stay calm and focused, despite the "anxiety" and "some butterflies" he felt, on the fighting task at hand. And lastly, he is grateful and feels honored in being able to unite fans to watch him fight. I followed up and asked him how he prepped for this ring entrance. Ramírez went from looking at me to looking down at his lap. According to Ramírez, there is no preparation for the ring entrance. He would rather have that part of the pageantry of boxing go faster so that the first round of the fight can start. Yet, as I reviewed and analyzed the video and transcript of this interview, I could not help thinking, respectfully of course, that Ramírez was wrong and not giving himself enough credit. A few moments later, Ramírez said that "after my buddy starts singing, man, that song, [it's a] reminder of who I am."[208] This statement alone demonstrates that whether fighters directly say it or not, their lived experiences inform the way they curate their ring entrance. In this case, with the help of his buddy who wrote and performs 's ring entrance song.

Ramírez considers himself a good man, one who is determined to always work hard and find a way to succeed. The buddy he is referring to is José Jesus Chavez Jr. or Chuy Jr. for short, son of lead vocalist and founder of Los Originales de San Juan, Jesus Chavez Sr. first met Chuy Jr. before turning professional and prior to the London 2012 Summer Olympics, where he represented team U.S.A., at Aldo's Nightclub in Fresno. According to Chuy Jr., a friend of his

[208] José Carlos Ramírez (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, January 2019.

approached him at the bar and told him that José, the boxer, wanted to meet him. Not even twenty years of age, Chuy Jr. signaled to the security to let Ramírez into the twenty-one and over part of the nightclub. Their conversation consisted of each man tracing their families' lineages to Mexico. Ramírez shared that his family is from Mexicali and Michoacán and Chuy Jr.'s from Jalisco, Mexico. Eventually, Ramírez asked if they could exchange contact information and the next day, Chuy Jr. invited Ramírez for some mariscos (Mexican seafood). Their friendship evolved to the point where Chuy Jr. composed the corrido, "Yo Soy José de Avenal," a song Ramírez uses for his ring entrance. A corrido is a ballad and musical form that tells a story, often about a male protagonist. Historically, these have included stories of the revolution and revolutionary figures like Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata. María Herrera Sobek describes corridos as generally the recounting of a story in first or third person.[209] A corrido for a boxer is significant for two reasons. One, a corrido is a way to honor the accomplishments and contributions of a fighter. Second and more specifically, it serves to cement a fighter's legacy through musical composition. This musical archive will outlive Chuy Jr. and Ramírez and will inform future boxers and fans of the sweet science about who Ramírez is and what he stood for.

Expressive Culture, Music, and Sport

Central to my concept of sporting entitlements is the ways that boxers use expressive culture in their ring entrances to assert their agency and self-author their identities and politics. As mentioned earlier, I define sporting entitlements as the ways in which professional boxers fluidly and subtly perform their multiple identities and subjectivities as well as politics, dissent, disruption, and resistance against dominant ideologies and structures of power through the deployment of expressive culture. In this chapter, I exclusively look at the deployment of music

[209] María Herrera Sobek, *The Mexican Corrido: A Feminist Analysis* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990).

and build on the work of Clyde Woods, Gaye Theresa Johnson, Shana Redmond, Ken McLeod, and Thabiti Lewis.

The idea of ring entrance or walk-up music is not solely reserved and relegated to the sport of boxing. Seth Swary, for example, has utilized psychology methods to examine music integration and emotional intelligence and sport performance in professional baseball. Swary argues that "music can be carefully selected and/or manipulated to produce performance-enhancing emotional and behavioral responses."[210] Ethnomusicologist Ken McLeod has posited that the salsa music used for catcher Victor Martinez's walk up to the batting plate speaks to a "more culturally expressive statement" of this Venezuelan ballplayer.[211] In the wrestling world, Gorgeous George is credited as the first wrestler to use entrance music during the 1940s and 50s. George's choice of music was "Pomp and Circumstance," which has also been used more recently by wrestling superstars like "Macho Man" Randy Savage and a remixed version by "Black Machismo" Jay Lethal.[212] It is worth mentioning that Muhammad Ali gained great inspiration from George's ability to entertain in and out of the ring. After attending a sold-out wrestling match that featured George, Ali stated: "I saw fifteen thousand people coming to see this man get beat… And this talking did it. I said, 'This is a goooood idea!'"[213] Of course, the idea of becoming a villain to be marketable was staunchly different for a Black man in the 1960s. The same convictions on racial justice and anti-war politics that made him a hero to the masses also made Ali public enemy

[210] Seth Swary, "*Yo, I like Your Walk-Up Song": Music Integration in Professional Baseball Gamedays* (West Virginia University: Graduate Thesis, Dissertations, and Problem Reports, 2020).

[211] Ken McLeod, *We Are the Champions: The Politics of Sports and Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 113.

[212] Kevin Williams, "Walk That Aisle: The Importance of Music in Wrestling," last modified November 22, 2008, https://bleacherreport.com/articles/84671-walk-that-aisle-the-importance-of-music-in-wrestling#:~:text=Gorgeous%20George%20is%20credited%20as,%22%20(the%20graduation%20song).

[213] Jonathan Eig, *Ali: A Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 83.

number one. Perhaps the showmanship of George influenced, to some extent, Ali's 1977 ring entrance against Earnie Shavers in the New York City Madison Square Garden. Thomas Hauser wrote that Muhammad Ali was innovative during the later years of his career when "he entered the ring to face Earnie Shavers to the majestic sound of the theme from Star Wars."[214] Beyond baseball and wrestling, the examples discussed here show that music plays an important role in creating an entertaining spectacle and for enhancing athletic performance. Yet, little has been written and researched about the ways that music is used by athletes to politically express themselves.

My idea of exploring the role and power of music in boxing stems from a podcast episode featuring Astead W. Herndon. Herndon, a national political reporter based in New York, was featured on The Daily podcast, discussing the music of the 2020 presidential candidates as more than just sound. Specifically, Astead argues that the music used says a great deal about the candidate's values, political platform, identity, and target audience.[215] In other words, music can function as a framing device for people, one that can be read, analyzed, and interpreted. Interdisciplinary scholar Clyde Woods' *Development Arrested* is a good example of this. This text centers African American communities in the Mississippi delta to examine the plantation regime's power and African American's utilization of a *blues epistemology,* a method and theory of resistance. Blues epistemology is created by working class African Americans in response to systems of power. Wood argues that "what is being expressed in the blues and its extensions is a

[214] Thomas Hauser, "The evolution of the ring walk: key moments that changed boxing introductions forever," last modified November 14, 2018, http://www.sportingnews.com/us/boxing/news/greatest-boxing-ring-walks-music-evolution/xjbud3xfr2bx18ti7r4g8kzpy.

[215] "What the 2020 Campaign Sounds Like," The Daily, August 22, 2019, https://open.spotify.com/episode/6NacjZuMsg1irlzKpBh0yi?si=vrxBw9XhSKixrMS9uESRQQ.

critique of plantation culture in all its manifestations."[216] As such, blues epistemology has a longstanding history in the Black Radical Tradition as the expressive culture of blues music was constructed within (and in resistance to) an antebellum plantation regime context. Woods further argues that regional issues matter as his examination of this space allows us to see how organized regional power is structured. As a method and theory of resistance, Shana Redmond's *Anthem* speaks powerfully to this idea. For Redmond, music is a method and "complex system of mean(ing)s and ends that mediate our relationships to one another, to space, to our histories and historical moment."[217] She argues that Black anthems construct a "sound franchise," which she argues is an organized melodic challenge used by African descended to proclaim their collectivity and the political agenda that informed their mobilization. In this dissertation, I use these ideas to situate my analysis of what their deployment of music means in relation to their fans and markets as well as the political interventions and claims to sporting entitlements they make.

A good example of this is "Prince" Naseem Hamed. On April 7, 2001, the highly anticipated featherweight match between Hamed and Marco Antonio Barrera took place in the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas. This sporting spectacle generated 310,000 pay-per-view[218] buys on cable television. Hamed wore leopard print trunks with "Prince" stitched on the front side and "Islam" on the back. Fighting out of Sheffield, Yorkshire, United Kingdom, Hamed brought into the ring an unapologetic demeanor that resembled many of the characteristics of the late activist boxer, Muhammad Ali. Before the start of their fight, ring commentators described

[216] Clyde Adrian Woods, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (New York: Verso, 1998), 20.

[217] Shana L Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 1.

[218] Pay-Per-View (PPV) is a type of pay television service by which a subscribers of a television service provider can purchase live events to view via private telecast. The majority of PPV events consist of boxing, mixed martial arts, and professional wrestling.

Hamed as the "cocky Hamed" due to his claims of being the *best-ever* and described his style as "unorthodox," "unpredictable," "reckless," and "unconventional."[219] Known for his spectacular entrances, Hamed's ring walk on this night started with fans chanting "Allah" and the sounds of The Takbīr drowning out the MGM Grand Garden in Las Vegas. His ring entrance and use of The Takbīr was an intentional one that transmitted an unapologetic political message of hyper-visibility that centered a Brown Muslim man, a performance that surely shook up the powers and privileges associated with a white Christian nation. This Islamic framing through music was further confirmed when analyzing the two spectacular banners that were placed right above Hamed's ring entrance walkway. The words on the banners were "Muhammad" to his right and "Allah" to his left, printed in the Arabic language. And finally, Muslim fans in the arena immediately responded to The Takbīr as several of them to the left of the stage raised a keffiyeh, which is a sign that signifies a time for prayer. What Hamed did here was temporarily transform a traditional sporting space into a spiritual mosque.

In my research, the name "Iron" Mike Tyson often came up. Whether it was a formal interview or oral history or sitting at the barber shop and talking in generalities about boxing or the specifics of ring entrance music and use of clothing, people always referenced the Brownsville, Brooklyn fighter. For example, in my interview with Jasiri X, a hip-hop artist, activist, boxing enthusiast, and founder of 1Hood Media, he told me Tyson resonated with him because his ring entrance "was like a statement, it was almost like a statement of where he was from. It was very no frills."[220] Thabiti Lewis has analyzed and made good use of Tyson's ring entrances to explore

[219] "Marco Antonio Barrera vs Prince Naseem Hamed," uploaded by "ExtraBoxing," May 20, 2013, retrieved April 2, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R6hbiCSAA28.

[220] Jasiri X (Hip Hop Artist and Activist) in discussion with Gaye Theresa Johnson and Rudy Mondragón, February 2019.

race and its influence on the performance of sport celebrity.[221] Specifically, Lewis looks at Tyson's use of "Welcome to the Terrordome" and "What's My Name?" by Public Enemy and DMX respectively, in his ring entrances. In this case, Lewis explores how a racial identity that is connected to hip hop culture rendered Tyson as Black and subjected him to the double standards of race. Prior to using hip hop music in his ring entrances, Tyson had an all-white management and training team. With an all-white team, Tyson was celebrated as a redeemable hero who was under the right guidance and control. His past and present transgressions were not demonized because his team "often used their white presence- and his white entourage – to put America at ease regarding this volatile Black figure."[222] When Tyson singed a contract with infamous boxing promoter, Don King, Tyson's public image drastically changed. With this shift in having a Black entourage and using hip hop music in his ring entrances, Lewis contends that the media shifted its narrative of Tyson as a savage, reflecting the realities of racial prejudice and the double standards found in racial discourses.

Lewis's work is important because it situates the analysis on meaning making of the racialized process associated to Tyson's use of hip hop music and a Black entourage. What my work is concerned with is how music is used as a framing device to challenge the status quo. Ken McLeod's *We Are the Champions* is an important text that puts music and sport in conversation with each other. In his book, McLeod examines the intersection of popular music and sport in North American and Europe from the 18th to 21st century. Filling an important void in the literature that saw sport and music as mutually exclusive topics of inquiry, McLeod's text is concerned with

[221] Thabiti Lewis, "Don't Believe the Hype: The Racial Representation of Mike Tyson in Three Acts," in *Fame to Infamy: Race, Sport, and the Fall from Grace,* ed. David C. Ogden and Joel Nathan Rosen (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2010).

[222] Lewis, "Don't Believe the Hype," 52.

the ways that sport and music construct, contest, reinforce, and re-envision gender, racial, and national identities.[223] The goal of this chapter is to build on this intersection and go beyond the way music and sport construct social identities to instead interrogate the agency displayed by boxers in their selection of music to make political statements rooted in their oppositional identities and claims of sporting entitlements.

Music as Framing Devices for Pugilistic Stories

The music used in a boxer's ring entrance functions as a framing device that can be read, analyzed, and interpreted to learn more about the (un)intended messages being elucidated. Based on my conversations with current and retired world champion fighters, there was a consistent response that fighters have the agency to select the music that plays as they make their way to the ring. Robert Guerrero, a former featherweight, and junior lightweight world champion who also held interim world titles at the lightweight and welterweight division, told me song selection is a big deal. Specifically, that fighters can pick whatever song they want every time they enter the ring. From his perspective, managers and promoters want a fighter to be mentally ready to go to battle and music is one way to make a fighter "feel good" and "prepared."[224] Aside from music getting fighters motivated and ready for combat, Guerrero also believes that song selection is "a big deal" because it helps in "pumping up the crowd, getting them excited, going and then also yourself."[225] According to Guerrero, song selection for his ring entrance is about getting him focused and ready for his fight. He also mentions the role music plays in engaging audiences. Speaking to me from the perspective of a former world champion and current premier boxing

[223] McLeod, *We Are the Champions.*

[224] Robert Guerrero (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, December 2016.

[225] Ibid.

trainer of José Carlos Ramírez and many other world champions, Robert Garcia shared with me that especially for main event fighters, song selection is based on their musical interest and how "they identify themselves."[226] The purpose of this is to demonstrate to the boxing community, fans, and "world [about] who they are with a song."[227] As a retired fighter, Garcia speaks about his former experiences as well as from an informed perspective given that he currently trains world champion fighters. Music is important because fighters want to identify themselves with their fans and the way a fighter curates their ring entrance and selects their music is one way of making themselves and their stories accessible.

In my conversation with Khnum Muata Ibomu (also known by his stage name, stic.man), a hip hop artist, activist, founder of Fit Hop, and member of legendary rap duo *dead prez,* he revealed an insightful parallel that boxing and hip hop culture share:

> Boxing is an art form, and the sport of boxing is a theater, right. In all story telling, you have to have music, you know. You can't have a film without no music, you know what I mean. You know music is the personification of the emotions, you know that the director and a story wants to get across. So when a when a fighter is directing his story in that moment, he's scoring his theme.[228]

This idea that boxing is theater is a common one, understood by the promoters, managers, and power brokers of this sporting industry. For example, in the critically acclaimed documentary *Champs,* Lou DiBella, CEO of DiBella Entertainment, described boxing as such: "There's a drama to it. Boxing is theater. If it's not theater, you're fucking up in presenting it."[229] DiBella is speaking from a business perspective of putting on a show that can yield financial capital. The sport of

[226] Robert Garcia (boxing trainer and former professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, September 2019.

[227] Ibid.

[228] Khunum Muata Ibomu aka. stic.man (Hip Hop Artist and Activist) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón and Ise Lyfe, March 2019.

[229] *Champs*, directed and produced by Bert Marcus, (Amplify and Starz, 2015), Netflix.

boxing is dependent on narratives and stories that drive the theatrical drama and spectacle. Ibomu deviates from this as he speaks from the lens of the fighters, who understand this theatrical element of the sport, yet use it to function as a platform for story telling. Ibomu strongly suggests that a fighter's ring entrance and their choice in music is a conscious act of art, a process that he describes as a fighter "scoring [their] theme." To effectively tell one's story, Ibomu posits, music is needed to elicit emotions and to clearly communicate one's message.

Mikko Mabanag is the marketing manager for Churchill Boxing Gym, which is owned by Churchill Management, a sports and entertainment management company founded by Peter Berg and Mark Wahlberg. Mabanag believes that the lyrics of the music played in a fighter's ring entrance should communicate who they are because that is what helps construct a brand. More importantly, "it helps you continue your story."[230] Mabanag also believes that the music and accompanying lyrics play a role in motivating the fighter as well as to intimidate one's opponent. Yet, during our discussion, Mabanag stressed that music can be used to speak to who the fighter is as a person, which then also makes the fighter accessible to the crowd, fans, and allows the fighter to make their mark before stepping into the ring. This is of course from a marketing standpoint, which Mabanag emphasizes that a song must help continue a fighter's story but also their brand. In other words, to continue one's story and building their brand are ideas and strategies that coexist for Mabanag. To continue one's story or to engage in story telling can be understood as a project of liberation, agency, and decolonization. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, for example, argues that story telling is a decolonial method and that every single story is powerful because stories serve to connect the past with the future and is a representation of multiple truths.[231] In using music

[230] Mikko Mabanag (boxing marketing manager) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, September 2019.

[231] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples,* (New York: Zed Books, 2012).

and sound to continue their stories, boxers deploy this form of expressive culture to speak their truths and experiences in an entertaining and creative way.

Musical Composers Customizing Ring Entrance Songs

Mike Tyson and Tupac Shakur

In professional boxing, it is not rare for a famed musical artist to compose a song for a fighter. There is an abundance of examples of corridos that situate a boxer as the protagonist of the song's story as well as numerous hip-hop tracks that directly reference or use boxing or boxers as metaphors for poignantly written lyrics. Writing and performing a song for a fighter represents a symbol of honor and mutual respect, one that was described by Robert Garcia as holding special meaning both for the fighter who is the subject of the song but also a distinct opportunity for the musical artist who gets to write a song about them, with even greater significance when they receive the blessing and approval of the fighter. In 1995, "Iron" Mike Tyson had just been released from prison after serving three years of a six-year sentence for a rape conviction. That same year, Tyson had scored tune-up fight victories over Peter McNeeley and Buster Mathis Jr. Early in 1996, he faced Frank Bruno of the United Kingdom and beat him by third round stoppage to claim the World Boxing Council Heavyweight world title. On September 7, 1996 Tyson was set to face Bruce Seldon. For this fight, Tyson would enter the ring to a tailormade song composed by his good friend, Tupac Shakur. Shakur's "Let's Get It On" is significant because it demonstrates a collaborative element between artist and boxer in the sporting entitlement claims made by Tyson. Specifically, it speaks to a friendship between two celebrity Black men and their use of hip-hop culture and sport to disrupt sensationalized images of Black men. "Let's Get It On" allows for the reimagination of a dark mid-1990s world and its accompanying structural challenges that were stacked against Black men like Tyson and Tupac.

Tyson's and Tupac's friendship is the 1990s version of Muhammad Ali's and Malcolm X's friendship of the civil rights era. The two met at a nightclub where Tyson invited Tupac, who ended up bringing a 50-person entourage with him.[232] In 1992, Mike Tyson started serving his jail sentence and one of his regular visitors was Tupac. Their friendship continued to develop, and a strong and intimate bond was formed between the two. I describe it as strong and intimate because of the trust and respect each had for one another. For example, in 1994, Tupac was a guest on the Arsenio Hall Show. After reflecting on and praising Hall for the television deal he cut with Viacom and his work in bringing Black hip-hop artists to his show, Hall stated: "I'm glad you and Mike are talking man, can you talk anything to them [audience] about that?" To that, Tupac responded:

> Well, Tyson had been calling me from before all the trouble. He was calling just to say you know, "I wish I was out while you was out. [Laughing] I heard you party, I wanna be out there partying with you." He gave me a lot of advice. I really look up to him. So, for him to tell me to calm down, I was like woo, it's time to calm down. It's time to calm down. If Mike Tyson is telling me, that he heard about me, from jail. Calm down. I'm like, calm down, you know what I'm saying?

Being five years older than Tupac, Tyson in a way served as a big brother figure to him while also maintaining mutual respect. As Tyson was nearing his release from prison in March 1995, Tupac was arrested on sexual assault charges and served nine months before his release in October of that year. At this point, their friendship continued outside the confines of prison cells and gates, ultimately leading to Tyson's September 1996 fight against Seldon. Tupac would not only attend this fight, but also put pen to paper to write "Let's Get It On," Tyson's ring entrance anthem.

Tupac was an artist who built on what Cedric Robinson called the Black Radical Tradition. The Black Radical Tradition is defined as a tradition of Black resistance that is grounded in more than five centuries and produces visions of a collective future rooted in the promise of abolishing

[232] Nika Shakhnazarova, "Mike Tyson's close friendship with Tupac as rapper visited him in prison," last modified November 28, 2020, https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/mike-tysons-close-friendship-tupac-23066548.

all forms of oppression.[233] "Let's Get It On" is a track that is born out of the friendship and collaboration between Tyson and Tupac. It centered Tyson as the protagonist of the story and offered a Nostradamus like vision and prediction of a bright future that was destined for the man they call "Iron." The track, which was recorded in less than a week's time at the North Hollywood Track Record studio, starts off with Tupac introducing the audience to the protagonist of the story:

> In this corner
> The ghetto gladiator
> Iron Mike Tyson
> Never been defeated
> Can't keep a good man down!
> And in this corner riding with him
> Ha Ha

The introduction of the song is a declaration of Tyson as a Black man who has seen struggle both in and out of the ring. Recently released from prison and having been defeated for the first time in his boxing career by James "Buster" Douglas in 1990, Tupac imagines and situates his friend as a man who is still worthy and "undefeated" and one that keeps fighting despite the obstacles ever so present for Black men when it comes to the prison industrial complex and tropes of the dangerous, threatening, and hyper-sexualized Black beast. The idea of Tyson being seen as a "Black threat" is especially evident as Thabiti Lewis has argued that the perception of Tyson negatively shifted after he hired Don King, was accompanied by a Black entourage, and began entering the ring to the sounds of Black rap groups like Public Enemy.[234] The introduction verse also informs the world that Tyson has Tupac in his entourage, which communicates a message about the power that comes in numbers and collaboration versus acting individually.

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[233] Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

[234] Thabiti Lewis, "Don't Believe the Hype: The Racial Representation of Mike Tyson in Three Acts," in *Fame to Infamy: Race, Sport, and the Fall from Grace,* ed. David C. Ogden and Joel Nathan Rosen (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2010).

"Let's Get it On" is also utilized as a promotional piece that prophesizes the eventual showdown between Tyson and Evander Holyfield. Not only does Tupac predict the future victory of Tyson in the ring on that 1996 night when he says, "Oh no, 2Pac wit' team Tyson, Seldon was seldom seen, Iron Mike cut his head like a guillotine," but he also informs the world that the highly anticipated match between Tyson and Holyfield would inevitably take place. He states: "We keep it real, tell Holyfield, he next in line, so get his heart problem check 'fore he steps to mine." This bar is then followed up in the track with "Hey Holyfield, you next! HA!" repeated twice over. This highly anticipated match goes back to the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Olympics, where Holyfield represented the U.S. boxing team and Tyson was relegated as an alternate. Tyson went on to turn professional as a result while Holyfield competed in the Olympic games and was controversially disqualified in the semifinal bout, eventually earning a bronze medal. A fight between Holyfield and Tyson began to seriously materialize by 1990. Holyfield actually sat ringside to watch Tyson fight Buster Douglas, which was intended to be a tune-up fight to set up a fight between these two giants. This was the first delay to a mega fight between the two. So in "Let's Get it On," Tupac is alluding to this history and warning Holyfield to check his heart before he steps to Tupac and Tyson. This bar is about a misdiagnosed heart condition that forced Holyfield to temporarily retire in 1994. These two warriors would eventually square off in the ring, as Tupac predicted (and the rest of the well-informed boxing world), on the night of November 9, 1996, in a match that was promotionally titled, "Finally."

The story telling in this song matters because "Let's Get It On" functions as an oral history about a particular moment in Tyson's career. The Black expressive culture element of hip-hop is also significant because it amplifies a necessary disruption, though very brief, to the idea of East Coast/West Coast rivalries that were at their peak in the mid 1990s. In his track, Tupac also

localizes the geographies of each person in a unifying effort. Tyson is the "The Bed-Stuy ass kicker" while Tupac proclaims a "Westside 'til we die" ethos. Gwendolyn D. Pough has written about the legacies of hip-hop where she connects the East Coast/West Coast war in hip-hop with the split between East Coast and West Coast Black Panthers. This split occurred when members of the Panther 21 were arrested and indicted for alleged bomb threats. Huey P. Newton's public denouncement of the Panther 21 started the split between the New York Black Panthers chapter and those headquartered in Oakland. A war erupted between chapters, which has been alleged to been fueled by the FBI, eventually leading to the demise of the Party.[235] One of the members of the Panther 21 was Afeni Shakur, Tupac's mother. Dough argues that as "Afeni gave us Tupac, the Black Power Movement gave us Hip-Hop," and they eventually became the "physical embodiment for the link between the Black Power Movement and Hip-Hop culture."[236] Tupac would go on to form an allegiance with California gangsta rappers and became a critical component of the East Coast/West Coast rap war, which stemmed from East Coast rappers' failure to acknowledge the West Coast as well as the contention that the FBI played a role in starting the Hip-Hop war.[237]

"Let's Get It On" disrupts a moment in time when the media sensationalized the West Coast/East Coast war. By writing and recording a Hip-Hop rap song for his Brooklyn (Bedford-Stuyvesant and Brownsville) friend, Tupac's track makes it possible for the world to see an affinity and solidarity between two Black men from opposite coasts. In other words, the tracks functions as a framing device to both center Tyson as the protagonist of the story while also creatively and

[235] Gwendolyn D. Pough, "Seeds and Legacies: Tapping the Potential in Hip-Hop," in *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader,* eds. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004), 283-289.

[236] Pough, "Seeds and Legacies," 287.

[237] Ibid.

artistically demonstrating to the world that a different world is possible. Tyson's curation of this sonic space and selection of Tupac's music taps into a rich history that dates to the Black Power Movement as well as Black Panther influences. And Tupac demonstrated great potential that we unfortunately never got to witness due to his death at the young age of 25. Sway Calloway said this about his final interview with Tupac: "Sway man, I'm making the hardest music I can and saying what people want to hear most, so I can get the most amount of people who need to hear this, to follow me and then Imma come back and tell em what they need to hear the most. But he didn't get a chance to do it."[238] Though Tupac did not get a chance to do this beyond age 25, the lyrics that he put forth for this ring entrance hip hop track speaks to an unapologetic Blackness that promotes the idea of rebellion and outlaw culture that is embodied by Tyson to this very day. To do things their way, the way of the rebellious outlaw, is sometimes the only way to do it.

Miguel Cotto and Calle 13

The idea of continuing one's story through their song selection for a ring entrance is demonstrated in Miguel Cotto's December 3, 2011 rematch against Antonio Margarito. For this match up, Cotto's friend, René Pérez Joglar, also known as Residente of the Puerto Rican alternative rap group Calle 13, remixed an exclusive version of "El Hormiguero." This song is from Calle 13's third album *Entren Los Que Quieran* (2010), which Ryan Pinchot contends is an album where this hip-hop duo began to show more overt political intentions.[239] The original version of "El Hormiguero" is a song that, according to Melinda Sommers Molina, explores "the immigrant subaltern experience by describing the border-crossing experience as one that is both

[238] Menace II Society Director Reveals Blow for Blow Fight With Tupac & Thoughts on the N-Word," uploaded by SWAY'S UNIVERSE, January 14, 2013, retrieved March 2, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=am6zf6ZZbVU.

[239] Ryan Pinchot, "Calle 13 and Na Tijoux's Joyous Rebellion: Modeling Transnational Protest through Lyric and Song," *Latin American Music Review* 41, no. 2 (2020): 196-225.

subterranean and non-human."[240] The track includes appropriation of sound samples of Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Subcomandante Marcos speeches as well as references to Emiliano Zapata, which function as Latin-American revolutionary declarations that represent guerrilla leftist ideologies that stand up against North American imperialism and those who support it.[241] Furthermore, Molina posits that the lyrics reimagine the socioeconomic position and influence of Latinos by providing an alternative social construction of a Latino immigrant subjectivity. The song makes use of metaphor by making the analogy of immigrants from Latin America as ants with collective power when they join forces. At the same time, the song uses satire to demonstrate how the U.S. views Latin American immigrants as an invading force. This idea of "invading force" is key as Calle 13 aims to disrupt anti-immigrant and nativist discourse. This discourse is what Leo Chavez has termed The Latino Threat Narrative, which posits that "Latinos are not like previous immigrant groups, who ultimately became part of the nation" and that taken-for-granted "truths" frame Latinos as an invading force from the south who are unwilling or incapable of integrating and becoming part of the national community.[242] In remixing this track and incorporating Cotto as the protagonist of the story, Calle 13 not only situates the boxer as a figure of imperial resistance but also as a hero who is out to get revenge on an opponent who once defeated him in a manner that Cotto strongly believed was unjust.

The track starts off with Cotto's early upbringing as a Puerto Rican man who grew up in Cañaboncito, a barrio in the municipality of Caguas, Puerto Rico. Cotto was born in Providence,

[240] Melinda Sommers Molina, "Calle 13: Reggaeton, Politics, and Protest," *Journal of Law & Policy* 46, (2014): 117-148.

[241] Sommers Molina, "Calle 13: Reggaeton, Politics, and Protest."

[242] Leo R. Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 3.

Rhode Island on October 29, 1980, the same day as the great Wilfredo Gomez Rivera, a former professional boxer and International Boxing Hall of Fame inductee from San Juan, Puerto Rico. Before turning two, Cotto and his family moved to Puerto Rico and according to the song, Cotto was baptized with Taína blood, a reference to Taínos who are indigenous to the island. This statement speaks to a racially heterogenous Puerto Rico and disrupts that idea of "harmonious integration" of the three races (Taínos, Spanish, and African) as a single Puerto Rican race given that the idea of Puerto Rico stems from the imposition of Eurocentric power over Taínos and Africans and "the rape and coercive sexual appropriation of subordinated indigenous and African women."[243] As the song progresses, so does the story, as it moves to the specific context in which Miguel Cotto finds himself in for his December 2011 fight. Calle 13 presents Cotto as a strong, ready, and loved fighter who has his family and the island of Puerto Rico supporting him. When Resident of Calle 13 states "ponte yeso señor inocente, pa' partirte la madre, solo hay que ser intelligent, tu eres un criminal frente a la gente, yo soy un campeón en tres divisions diferentes," he is alluding to Antonio "El Tornado de Tijuana" Margarito and their first fight that took place July 26, 2008.

In this bloody fight, Cotto emerged as the more technical boxer who was securing rounds on the judges scorecards up until the end of the sixth round. This was the turning point in the fight as Margarito, who is an aggressive pressure fighter, began to impose his power and force over Cotto, eventually forcing Cotto to take a knee in the 11th round and his corner to throw in the towel. Margarito had pulled off an upset and the biggest win in his career as he took Cotto's World Boxing Association World Welterweight title. Yet, less than six months later, Margarito would go on to

[243] Afro-Puerto Rican Testimonies: An Oral History Project in Western Puerto Rico, "Against the Myth of Racial Harmony in Puerto Rico," in *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States,* eds. Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 508-511.

defend his belt against "Sugar" Shane Mosely on January 24, 2009 at the Staples Center in Los Angeles. Prior to the bout, Mosely's trainer Naseem Richardson was in Margarito's dressing room to watch his team wrap his hands. Richardson brought it to the attention of the California State Athletic Commission that Margarito's hands were being wrapped with something "illegal" that "did not belong there" and the commission removed the "hard plastic shell" for further inspection.[244] The fight went on nonetheless and Mosely violently battered and dominated Margarito until the fight was stopped in the ninth round. Immediately following Margarito's defeat to Mosely, Jim Lampley of HBO Boxing rightfully called into question the "thudding blows" that "beat down Miguel Cotto last July."[245] In other words, Lampley questioned whether Margarito had loaded gloves in his fight with Cotto. The commission eventually determined that the hard plastic shell contained sulfur and calcium, which are the ingredients of plaster of paris, the same substances used to make casts.[246] Having plaster of paris inside the gloves of a fighter is a serious offense because as the fight progresses, the substances harden, making the fists of a fighter even more deadly weapon.

This is the context that informed Residente's remix of El Hormiguero. It is clear when Residente raps:

Hoy no me tumba nadie	Today nobody knocks me down
Ni la marina	Not even the marine (army)
Porque mi madre Juana	Because my mother Juana
Esta en mi esquina	Is in my corner
Ponte yeso señor inocente	Put on plaster innocent man/sir
Pa' partirte la madre	To kick your ass
Solo hay que ser inteligente	You just have to be smart
Tu eres un criminal frente a la gente	You're a criminal in front of the people

[244] "2009-01-24 Shane Mosley vs. Antonio Margarito," uploaded by DWiens421, March 4, 2013, retrieved April 3, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADO18BBet4w.

[245] Ibid.

[246] Cliff Eastham, "Shane Mosley and Antonio Margarito: Cheaters Treated Differently," last modified February 24, 2010, https://bleacherreport.com/articles/351425-shane-mosley-antonio-margarito-cheaters-tre.

Yo soy un campeón en	I'm a champion in
Tres divisiones diferentes	Three different weight classes

These lyrics situate Cotto as the protagonist and hero who is coming into this fight so strong and prepared that an entire army could not defeat him. The song situates Cotto as the champion in three different weight classes while his opponent Margarito is viewed as a criminal in the eyes of boxing fans. In the song, Residente sarcastically tells Margarito to load his gloves up again with plaster as he is confident that it will not matter in the fight because his friend will simply beat him with intelligence and a strategic game plan. There is also a familial and spiritual aspect that gives Cotto strength. This includes his wife Melissa and his three children, his mother Juana Vasquez, and his late father, who passed away on January 3, 2010, that will provide Cotto with "el oxígeno que necesito" (the oxygen he'll need) if the fight goes the full twelve rounds. Finally, the song also sends a message of Puerto Rican unity. When Residente states, "*y aunque me critican, esto va pa' Puerto Rico, una bandera, una sola Estrella"* (and even though they critique me, this goes out to Puerto Rico, one flag, one star), he is using Cotto's experience with a Puerto Rican fanbase that often critiqued him to reinforce a message about the importance of solidarity and collective power. Cotto comes from a strong lineage of boxers, which include Wilfredo Benítez, Sixto Escobar, Edwin Rosario, Wilfredo Gómez, and Héctor Camacho to name a few. Cotto's career overlapped with one of the most beloved Afro-Puerto Rican boxers of all time, Félix "Tito" Trinidad. Trinidad was a very extroverted world champion and peoples champion while Cotto, for the most part, was more reserved and of serious demeanor around boxing media and fans.

José Ramírez and Chuy Jr.

More recently, José Ramírez's ring entrance from his September 14, 2018 fight deployed the corrido "Yo Soy José de Avenal" performed and written by Chuy Jr. This song intersects with his "Pro-Immigrant and Proud" political message that Ramírez conveyed via red hats and t-shirts

that he and his team wore during the ring entrance. This pro-immigrant message was intended to challenge the nativist and racist Trump administration. The centering of Ramírez's narrative in Chuy Jr.'s corrido is also important because it intensifies the collective pride of fans who were there to cheer their fighter on. Chuy Jr.'s corrido provides a moment of disruption to Trump's racist nativist rhetoric directed at undocumented Mexican immigrants that he essentializes as drug smugglers and rapists. Ethnomusicologist Shana Redmond posits that music is a method and more than just sound as "it is a complex system of mean(ing)s and ends that mediate our relationship to one another, to space, to our histories and historical moment."[247] For Ramírez, it is important that his fans can relate and feel connected to him during the duration of his ring walk. The corrido that Chuy Jr. wrote for him plays a critical role in that. Chuy Jr. describes corridos as an art form that allows you to tell a story and capture the historical significance of a person.[248] The corrido he wrote for Ramírez, which he did in the span of 24 hours, is unique in that both have a personal relationship with each other, which gives Chuy Jr. access to intimate details and allows him to speak from first-hand experience. "Yo Soy José de Avenal" is also rooted in a rich expressive Mexican cultural tradition of song narrative known as corridos, which operates as a framing device that transforms the Save Mart Center into a constellation of collectivity where Ramírez is in solidarity with the migrant (un)documented agricultural workers that have been historically denied of their rights and humanity, most recently by Trump and his administration.

As a corrido artist, Chuy Jr. has demonstrated that he is more than just a singer. In my interview with him, Chuy Jr spoke frankly about two functions that his music serves: the first is

[247] Shana Redmon, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 1.

[248] José Jesus Chavez Jr. (Musical Artist) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, January 2020.

that his music responds to what the people want, which is to know what is happening in the world at this current moment and secondly, that corridos serve as an important archive that allows for the documentation and memorialization of the stories of the people he writes and sings about.[249] One example of his music responding to the people and their desire to know what is happening in the world can be found in Chuy Jr.'s 2017 album, "Racismo." In this album is a song named after the album, which was written by Jesus Chavez Sr., Chuy Jr.'s father, of Los Originals de San Juan. Together, Chuy Jr. and his father sing a corrido that informs their listeners to the racism that undocumented Mexican immigrants experience in the U.S. The song starts with Jesus Chavez Sr. sharing his sadness, confusion, and rage for the racist and dehumanizing ways that "gringos" treat undocumented Mexican immigrants in this country. The song also highlights many contradictions. One contradiction deals with the U.S. governments lack of action in addressing the exploitative working conditions and labor compensation for undocumented Mexican immigrants. Chavez Sr. then points out the way that the government seduced undocumented Mexican immigrants with citizenship if they served in the war in Iraq (2003-2011), where they more than likely served as frontline soldiers. The song further critiques the idea of citizenship in this country and uses this country's taxation system as an example to demonstrates that the collection of taxes does not consider whether someone has a valid "pasaporte" (passport) or proper documentation of citizenship. This corrido not only speaks to documenting social problems and presenting them to the people but also how "Racismo" is Chuy Jr.'s contribution to an archive that captures a specific memory and perspective about the racist treatment of undocumented Mexican immigrants in the 21st century. Corrido's like "Racismo" and "Yo So José De Avenal" are oral histories that can be read and analyzed to understand a particular moment in history. In reading and analyzing corridos,

[249] José Jesus Chavez Jr. (Musical Artist) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, January 2020.

the goal is not to find the absolute truth about a topic that is found in a song. It is more so a process to seek, uncover, and access information about the experiences of marginalized and disregarded histories, like those of undocumented and ethnically and racially minoritized peoples, that can be analyzed for signification and interpreted to generate new meaning and counternarratives.[250]

As Ramírez and his team waited at the edge of the tunnel for his ring entrance, fans chanted – "You can do this shit!" – "From Delano homey!" – "Avenal homey!" – "Knock his ass out!" – in support of their Central Valley champion. This speaks to the ways in which the sounds of a ring entrance are not just limited to the songs fighter's select for their ring entrance. It extends to the active participation of fans in Ramírez's ring entrance. This is what Gaye Theresa Johnson describes as discursive spaces that are creatively transformed to produce a shared soundscape with, in this case, Ramírez's fans.[251] Fans erupted in collective joy and pride as the sounds of an accordion signaled Ramírez and his entourage to start their ascension to the ring. The arena was illuminated by moving red lights and fans used the cameras on their cellular devices to capture the short moment as Ramírez's ring entrance ran for a total time of one minute and twenty-seconds. This allowed Chuy Jr. enough time to perform the first half of the corrido. Though the corrido does not make any statements that directly challenge Trump's politics, the centering of Ramírez' story as a professional boxer who works towards perfecting his craft as a champion, endures a great deal of sacrifices, and continues to move forward functions as a counter-anthem to Trump's hateful propaganda that is intended to destroy, divide, and pin communities against vulnerable undocumented immigrants.[252] The lyrics are in direct opposition to the way Trump frames

[250] Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

[251] Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity.*

[252] *Yo Soy José de Avenal,* Chuy Jr., Fresno, CA, September 14, 2018. The following are the specific lyrics in Spanish that I refer to in this section as performed by Chuy Jr. in José Ramírez's ring entrance on September 14,

undocumented Mexican immigrant men as criminals, rapists, and drug dealers. The corrido paints a powerful image of Ramírez, which ignites a sense of dignity, empowerment, and joy for the fans who can relate to the themes found in the lyrics of the song. Specifically, the corrido centers the Mexican state of Michoacán, highlights Ramírez as a hard worker full of dedication, the sacrifices involved in boxing, commitment to support his family, and loving his job as a prizefighter. It is easy to misinterpret boxing as an individual sport and corridos as privileging the stories of a single person. Yet, Chuy Jr.'s corrido actually transmits a message that privileges the theme of collectivity over individualism as the song's lyrics attributes Ramírez's success as being possible because of the support he receives from his family and fans.[253]

The corrido that Chuy Jr. wrote was dedicated to his friend, José. The belief he has in his friend goes beyond measure. Yet, he recognizes that his friend has the discipline and commitment to the sport to rise and be successful. For his fans who listen to this song, Chuy Jr. hopes that it is inspirational and transmits a message of hope, which he describes as "you guys can do it too," meaning that if one work hard and tries in life, then they can also achieve success. This message could be read as a generalized statement that ignores the structural realties of racism, nativism, sexism, and others hegemonic forces. Yet, the song, when put into its proper historical and political context is a song that transmits a critical necessary hope and inspiration from a popular figure like Chuy Jr. and exhibited through the lived experience of a successful prizefight like Ramírez. And this message of hope is nonetheless ephemeral and short lived. But for that ring entrance, this young man from Avenal, California curates a discursive space that is connected to his oppositional

2018: Lucho por la perfección y por ser un gran campeón - Son bastante los sacrificios los que tengo que pasar - Voy a seguir hacia delante.

[253] *Yo Soy José de Avenal,* Chuy Jr., Fresno, CA, September 14, 2018. Yo tengo mijo Mateo Maximiliano y mis papas, también cuento con mis hermanos, mi mujer y muchos más, que son ustedes los fanáticos jamás podría olvidar.

identities and dissenting voice against Trump's anti-immigrant propaganda that was at its climax at the time of this fight. Lastly, to the naked eye and ears, boxing can be misinterpreted as an individual sport and corridos as privileging the stories of a single person. Yet, Chuy Jr.'s corrido amplifies a message that privileges the theme of collectivity over individualism as the song's lyrics attributes Ramírez's success as being possible because of the support he receives from his family and fans.[254] Therefore, the sonic element found in his ring walk serves as a melodic framing of togetherness despite the forces of division and separation ever so present in the Trump Era.

FIGURE A. José Carlos Ramírez's ring entrance on September 14, 2018 wearing a "Pro-Immigrant and Proud" shirt. Photo by Rudy Mondragón

For Ramírez, being pro-immigrant and proud is part of his identity that comes with great responsibility. "When I say pro-immigrant and proud," he explains, "I'm also proud because *my job* is to prove to the groups of people who criticize immigrants, saying that they're all bad people, I'm proud to say that we're not."[255] What is significant about this is that Ramírez is aware that his celebrity platform gives him the unique opportunity to challenge divisive anti-immigrant narratives. As an athlete who is in support of immigration reform, Ramírez knows that he can leverage the excitement and energy that comes with a ring entrance and use it to amplify the efforts

[254] *Yo Soy José de Avenal,* Chuy Jr., Fresno, CA, September 14, 2018. Yo tengo mijo Mateo Maximiliano y mis papas, también cuento con mis hermanos, mi mujer y muchos más, que son ustedes los fanáticos jamás podría olvidar.

[255] José Carlos Ramírez (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, January 2019.

of activists, organizers, and policy advocates who have been working tirelessly towards meeting the needs of and supporting undocumented people who remain extremely vulnerable under the current presidential regime. The power that Ramírez's ring entrance has is that it mobilizes his fans toward a pro-immigrant and proud politic that is directed at creating action towards immigration reform. At the very least, it expands a social justice issue that makes it possible for organizers to become aware of a public figure who could be a potential source for solidarity building. Afterall, it is something that he plans to continue doing throughout his career. At the young age of 27, Ramírez feels more excitement in supporting political issues than having money in his bank account. "That excitement of helping people," he states, "I've done it in my career and it's only the beginning. The bigger I am, the more I'm going to do. So, if you're tired of me, if you don't want to hear me preach about what I believe in, man, you better get ready because the best thing is yet to come."[256] Ramírez's elaboration about wanting to help people as well as the curation of a disruptive ring entrance that centers Mexican pride, elevates immigration issues, demands immigration reform, and resists Trump's propaganda serves as an invitation for activists, organizers, and freedom fighters to explore the possibilities of collaborating with high profile athletic figures, like Ramírez, to influence social change together.

Who Run This Mutha? Girls!

Boxing is part of a sporting institution that excludes and limits on the bases of gender. As Adams, Schmitke, and Franklin contend, "with the exception of the military, sports is the most masculine, male-identified institution in the United States, and from its inception, it has been a closely cultivated arena for males to demonstrate their privilege and power."[257] For women in

[256] José Carlos Ramírez (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, January 2019.

[257] Natalie Adams, Alison Schmitke, and Amy Franklin, "Tomboys, Dykes, and Girly Girls: Interrogating the Subjectivities of Adolescent Female Athletes" in *Women's Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 1&2 (2005): 17-34.

boxing, this is a lived experience, whether they overtly or covertly address it or not throughout their careers, the structural realities of patriarchy and sexism is ever so present in this sport. In this section, I will discuss and analyze the ring entrances of Claressa "T-Rex" Shields and Maricela "La Diva" Cornejo, two non-white women who have curated sporting spaces of resistance and disruption that are rooted in their oppositional identities as women in a male dominated sport. This issue of representation based on gender is gigantic. According to BoxRec, there are a total of 49,671 male boxers that are currently active in the sport. Women however, only account for a total of 1,420.[258]

Claressa "T-Rex" Shields

Claressa Shields was born March 17, 1995 in Flint, Michigan and started boxing at the young age of 11. It was her father who introduced her to the sport. Clarence "Bo" Shields was an amateur underground boxer who went to prison when Claressa was only two years old and was released when she was nine. When Claressa asked him if she could compete in boxing, Clarence told her that boxing was a man's sport.[259] With the support of her grandmother and her encouraging words to not accept any restrictions based on gender, Shields finally convinced her father to take her to the gym. The rest is history, one that is still unfolding in the boxing career of this rising star. Shields is the most decorated amateur boxer in the history of U.S. boxing. She is the only American fighter to capture multiple gold medals in Olympic competition. Prior to turning professional in boxing, Shields won gold medals in the 2012 and 2016 Olympics while competing in the women's middleweight division. She was still a junior in high school when she won gold in 2012, which

[258] BoxRec, retrieved April 21, 2021, https://boxrec.com/en/ratings?r%5Brole%5D=proboxer&r%5Bsex%5D=F&r%5Bdivision%5D=&r%5Bcountry%5D=&r%5Bstance%5D=&r%5Bstatus%5D=a&r_go=&offset=1400.

[259] "Straight out of Flint: Girl Boxer Aims for Olympics," last modifed Feburary 27, 2012, https://www.npr.org/2012/02/27/147500470/straight-out-of-flint-girl-boxer-aims-for-olympics.

also marked the first time the Olympics included women's boxing during competition. This accomplishment made Shields the first American boxer, male or female, to win gold consecutively for the U.S. After her second successful Olympic run, Shields turned professional in November of that same year. Four years later, on January 10, 2020, Shields became the fastest boxer in the history of the sport, male or female, to win world titles in three divisions. She was only 24 and did this by defeating Ivana Habazin in a fight that she won comfortably on all three judges' scorecards. It was on this night that Shields let the world know that she is the "Greatest Woman of All Time" or "GWOAT" for short. This claim borrows from the famous Muhammad Ali who often told the world in an unapologetic way that he was the "greatest!" To this day, media figures, academics, and boxing fans associate the idea of the "Greatest of All Time" or simply the "GOAT" with Ali. Shields uses this to make her own claims about being the best in the sport and adds "woman" to this claim to emphasis the distinction between male and female boxers. To better comprehend the degree of activism and resistance and disruption to patriarchy and sexism in boxing that Shields challenges, it is important to examine her ring entrance from the night she made history.

The ring entrance is a male dominated zone that Shields transforms on the night of January 10, 2020 into a space that elevates Black woman empowerment and defies the regulation of the female body in sport. It has been argued that the regulation of the female body in sport is accomplished through a variety of self-regulatory mechanisms like the adherence to ideals of beauty that force women to deface their bodies, control their food intake, and take up little space.[260] In this ring entrance, Shields takes up physical and discursive space through her deployment of Beyoncé's 2011 song titled, "Run the World." As Shields and her entourage make their way out

[260] Sandra Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Found in Adams, Schmitke, and Franklin, "Tomboys, Dykes, and Girly Girls."

of her dressing room, an intentional formation begins to unfold. When they reach the edge of the tunnel to start Shields' ring walk, the boxer stands between two women, very similar to Beyoncé in the music video for "Run the World." The use of Beyonce's song serves as a soundscape that enables Shields to frame her intervention of gender justice in boxing. Additionally, in mega fights, it is rare to see a fighter enter the ring to the sounds of a woman. The last time I saw this happen was in 2018 when Deontay "Bronze Bomber" Wilder entered the ring in the Barclays Center in Brooklyn to a live performance by Lil' Kim, who is a native of the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood. This was highly anticipated match averaged 1.1 million viewers and peaked at 1.2 million on Showtime.[261]

There is intentionality in the choice of music here. This fight took place in 2020, nine years after the song was released. Shield's is in a business that privileges the relevance economy, which means that the song one chooses should, in theory, be aligned with the current popular culture conjuncture and musical trends. In other words, selecting a song that can help market you to expand your market reach and value. Shield's choice of a song that is not currently trending is a political decision that she rejects and instead curates her ring walk with a song that has a clear message that supports her identity as the Greatest Woman of All Time (GWOAT), woman empowerment, and a disruption to patriarchy and sexism in the male dominated sport of boxing. As the music started, Shields and the two women begin to stoically thrust their shoulders up and down in a fast pace that matches the rhythm of the song. It is the same dance routine used in the beginning of Beyonce's music video, which situates her as the leader of a group of strong women who are ready to engage in battle against a large group of Black men. The lyrics found in Beyoncé's track challenges patriarchy with lyrics that center women who defy conventional notions of womanhood:

[261] Keith Idec, "Wilder-Ortiz Showtime's Highest-Rated Fight Since Wilder-Stiverne," last modified March 6, 2018, https://www.boxingscene.com/wilder-ortiz-showtime-highest-rated-fight-wilder-stiverne--125952.

I'm repping for the girls who taking over the world
Help me raise a glass for the college grads
41' Rollie to let you know what time it is, check
You can't hold me (You can't hold me)
I work my nine to five and I cut my check
This goes out to all the women getting it in
Get on your grind
To the other men that respect what I do
Please accept my shine

In addition to this anthem's hook of "Who Runs the World? Girls!", which serves as a mantra and assertive reminder to the world that women in boxing and the broader society are force to be wrecking with, the lyrics above are specifically mixed together in her ring entrance to create a particular experience and message. That message that Shields intends to convey is that women in boxing are just as competitive, talented, worthy, and entertaining as the men. In other words, Shields is "repping for the girls who [are] taking over the world" in boxing. Through her intervention does speak to the larger broader structural and hegemonic forces of patriarchy and sexism, Shields is very clear that her mission is to lift women's boxing. In her post-fight interview with ShowTime Boxing sportscaster Jim Gray, Shields declared, "I wanna grow women's boxing. I want us to have equal pay, equal opportunity."[262] Shields is on her "grind" and at the young age of 26, has been able to earn the respect from other men in boxing for what she does.

For this ring entrance, Shields was accompanied by a group of Black men who also happen to be some of the most accomplished celebrities in boxing. These Black men are current and former world champions. They included Terence "Bud" Crawford, Andre "S.O.G." Ward, Shakur "Fearless" Stevenson, Jamal Herring, and Andre "The Resurrected" Dirrell. It is worth mentioning that Dirrell, who is also from Flint Michigan, has engaged in collective activism with Shields on

[262] Claressa Shields After Historic Win: 'I'm the GWOAT!" | SHOWTIME BOXING SPECIAL EDITION, uploaded by SHOWTIME Sports, January 10, 2020, retrieved February 3, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=By8Nrt7W7FI.

the Flint Water Crisis, which was an environmental injustice issues that resulted from systemic racism. The visual curation of a ring entrance with notable Black fighters who have great political capital in boxing is immense. It demonstrates the possibilities of what it can look like if Black men (men in general) take on a supportive role for women. This was Black men allyship in the flesh, unfolding in a boxing ring entrance that took place in less than three minutes! And yes, these men were accepting her shine, as each one of the Black male fighters showed this by hold one of Shields' seven world titles above their heads.[263] This demonstration of love and respect is powerful given that Black women in boxing are often erased from the historical record and managers and promoters do not invest the same amount of time, energy, money, and marketing power on them as they do for male boxing.

What are the limitations of a ring entrance that takes place in a hyper-capitalist and neoliberal context? Chandra Talpade Mohanty reminds us that there are particular and problematic directions within U.S.-based feminism. One of them is the increase in corporatization of U.S. culture and naturalization of capitalist values, which "has had its own profound influence in engendering a neoliberal, consumerist (protocapitalist) feminism concerned with 'women's advancement' up the corporate and nation-state ladder."[264] It is reductive and uncritical to look at Shields, and other fighters for that matter who have engaged in transgressive ring entrances, as simply performing in alignment of a neoliberal capitalist system because it ignores their precarious position in this labor market. It also overlooks the collectivity that is uniquely found in women's

[263] At this point of Shields' career, she had earned the International Boxing Federation World Super Middleweight, World Boxing Council World Super Middleweight, International Boxing Federation World Middleweight, World Boxing Association World Middleweight, World Boxing Council World Middleweight, and World Boxing Association World Middleweight titles. After beating Ivana Habazin on January 10, 2020, Shields captured the vacant World Boxing Council World Super Welterweight and World Boxing Organization World Super Welterweight titles. With this win, she became a world champion in three different weight classes.

[264] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 6.

boxing. At this point, women in boxing understand that the biggest issue in boxing is equal pay and a larger investment in women by promoters and television and streaming networks. To navigate this, women who face each other in the ring see themselves not only fighting on another but fighter together to help advance women's boxing. As women who take part in the relevance economy of boxing, choosing the collective over the individual is a risk in and of itself. And to be a Black and/or Brown woman in the fight game is an added layer to the complexities and messiness of fighting for justice and to make a living.

Maricela "La Diva" Cornejo

Maricela "La Diva" Cornejo is a Mexican American boxer who grew up east of Seattle in Grandview, Washington. Born on April 16, 1987, Cornejo grew up playing volleyball, basketball, and softball as well as auditioning for America's Next Top Model and landing acting roles in Los Angeles before lacing up the boxing gloves. When she first moved to Los Angeles, Cornejo arrived not knowing a single soul in Hollywood. Eventually, she met a famous actor who promised her a role in a movie if she was able to lose weight. To lose 5-10 pounds, Cornejo turned to Hollywood's Wild Card Boxing Gym, home of famed boxing trainer Freddie Roach and the training grounds for global icon Manny "Pac Man" Pacquiao. It was there where she met ex-fighter turned trainer, Frankie Duarte, who told Cornejo that she "hit like a dude," informing her of a hidden talent she did not know he possessed. This was the classic "I didn't choose boxing, boxing chose me," story.[265] In 2012, she set out to accomplish one goal, which was to compete in one amateur boxing match.[266] After two successful amateur fights, Cornejo turned professional, making her debut on August 4, 2012. The road to professional boxing has not been an easy one. At the age of four or

[265] David A. Avila, "Maricela Cornejo gives herself a fighting chance," April 6, 2017, last modified April 9, 2017, https://www.pe.com/2017/04/06/cornejo-gives-herself-a-fighting-chance/.

[266] Avila, "Maricela Cornejo gives herself a fighting chance."

five, Cornejo was sexually molested, resulting in trauma that led to self-hate, multiple suicide attempts while in high school, and a dangerous addiction to methamphetamine while she was in college.

Eventually, Cornejo left Los Angeles for Las Vegas, in search of a new boxing trainer. Seasoned boxing journalist David A. Avila reported that various ill friendships and an ambitious nature led to Cornejo's arrest and banishment from Las Vegas, where she faced a potential 10-year prison term after being arrested during a drug seizure.[267] In the "Talk Box with Michael Woods" podcast, Cornejo shared that she served jail time in 2015, yet it is unclear how much time she spent in jail given that she fought her fourth professional fight on July 25, 2015.[268] Nonetheless, the time she did spend in jail gave Cornejo time to reflect on her life and career in boxing. She recommitted herself to boxing and revived her original vision in the sport. Her vision was to use boxing as a strategy to help create a platform for herself that would allow her to break into the entertainment industry. In other words, boxing is a steppingstone that could catapult and set up a career in acting and entertainment. Yet, my interview with Cornejo shows that she has also utilized her platform as a boxer to curate a ring entrance that speaks to representing strong women through her deployment of Mexican banda music.

To best understand Cornejo's ring entrance that represented strong women, it is necessary to contextualize the moment. While Cornejo was imprisoned, she imagined two things: One was signing a promotional contract with Golden Boy Promotions, a premier boxing promotions firm owned and started by East Los Angeles native boxer Oscar De La Hoya. This was important because at the time, she would have been the first woman to sign with a company that only had

[267] Ibid.

[268] "Talk Box with Michael Woods – Episode #120 – Maricela Cornejo & Charles Conwell, last modified July 12, 2018, http://teameverlast.everlast.com/talkbox-boxing-podcast-ep-120-maricela-cornejo-charles-conwell/.

signed male boxers. Secondly, Cornejo envisioned herself entering the ring with Jenni Rivera, a Chicana Mexican regional music singer who was known as "La Diva de la Banda" and "La Primera Dama del Corrido." These monikers translate to Rivera being a woman in a predominantly male genre of Mexican banda and corrido music. Yessica Garcia Hernandez has written about the impact that Rivera has had on her fans and argues that it produces responses and performances of "a working-class feminism that expresses a love and pleasure for oneself that is not typically sanctioned for women in Latina immigrant spaces." Hernandez calls these responses "intoxicating feminist pleasures,"[269] which extends to the context of boxing as Cornejo deploys the sounds of Rivera's song "Ovarios." Unfortunately, Jenni Rivera passed away on December 9, 2012 when the Learjet 25 she boarded crashed in Mexico. Since Cornejo's professional boxing career unfolded after the death of Rivera, Cornejo was not able to have Rivera perform a live rendition to "Ovaríos."

Fighters are known to "roll with the punches," meaning that they adapt their game plan and strategy during the fight to gain the upper hand over their opponents. After serving time in jail, Cornejo had to make changes to get her career back on track after a temporary setback. She did this while living in Los Angeles, which eventually led her to form a friendship with Jenni Rivera's daughter, Chiquis. This friendship is an important one because for her April 9, 2017 fight against Sydney LeBlanc, Cornejo was walked out to the ring by Chiquis, who performed a cover of her mother's "Ovarios" track. Although her vision to have Jenni Rivera walk her out did not come to fruition, Cornejo had the next best thing. In my interview with Cornejo, I asked her what that song meant and why she chose it for her ring entrance. Her response was the following:

> Mostly it's a representation of strong women no matter what's thrown their way they got bigger balls than most men and women. It goes both ways. That's just it. It's just a strong

[269] Yessica Garcia Hernandez, "Intoxication as Feminist Pleasure: Drinking, Dancing, and Un-Dressing with/for Jenni Rivera," *New American Notes Online* 9, (2016).

> female song. And the things that I've dealt with also. With men in this industry. And everyday life. With sexual harassment going around and everything like that. It does happen and it makes me mad at times, but it's how you handle it. And how you handle yourself. I mean, I can clearly say it has happened to me as well. But I think that's why I push a little harder and I won't give up.[270]

Cornejo here describes "Ovaríos" as a song that communicates a message of strong resilient women who overcome adversity. In her case, it has been the adversity and difficulties of being a woman in a predominantly male sporting industry. She also clearly expresses that one of the challenges of being in boxing as a woman is the sexual harassment that she has experienced, which fuels her to push harder and not give in. There is a parallel to the song as well as the experiences of Cornejo in the context of boxing. As Deborah Vargas has suggested, Jenni Rivera's "Las Malandrinas" defies "the contours of neoliberal Latina citizenship's performances of respectability, deference, and civility."[271] The sensibilities found in "Ovaríos" is one that speaks to refusal and an alternative way of being a Brown Chicana woman.

"Ovaríos" is the Spanish word equivalent of ovaries, which are the female gonads and primary female reproductive organs. The song here states "Los Ovaríos que me cargo" (the ovaries that I have), which is a word play on the male centered Spanish slang version of "big cojones" or "big balls," which equates the size of a man's testicle as determining the amount of strength and courage one carries. The use of ovaríos decenters this common male phrase and adds a woman slang version. The opening of this track is intended to address the jealousy and hate that targets strong women who are navigating and finding success in competitive male dominated spaces. Cornejo links this song to her own experiences in boxing, stating that "a lot of people happen to

[270] Maricela Cornejo (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, December 2017.

[271] Deborah R. Vargas, "Ruminations on lo Sucio as a Latino Queer Analytic," *American Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2014): 715-726.

bash me at times because they say I got to the position that I got to by sleeping around or things like that."[272] She resents this treatment because she is often accused of using her sex appeal to garner the attention she has gotten in boxing. Ideally, she would want people judging her based on her performances inside the ring and not on how she presents her feminine self. At different times in her career, Cornejo has downplayed her femininity and sexuality because she wanted to be judged on her skills and abilities and not on her looks. In having Chiquis Rivera walk her out and her overall deployment of "Ovaríos" is a way for Cornejo to convey a message about empowering young girls and women. During our interview, she emphasized this message found in her ring entrance: "don't let anyone shame you for being a woman in a man's sport. That's what I want to inspire women and any girl that comes up, that they don't have to just be… you know, when most people think of a boxer, they think, oh, well butch looking or something like that. And no, it's not that." The sonic pedagogies of Rivera's music allows Cornejo to articulate an alternative way of knowing and being in the world of boxing that challenges the status quo as well as transmits a message of Brown Chicana and Latina empowerment.[273]

A Close Reading of the Sounds of Religion and Spirituality

Andre "SOG" Ward

Andre "SOG" Ward is a retired prizefighter whose father first introduced him to the sport at the young age of nine. During his first trip to the gym, Ward met his future trainer and Godfather, Virgil Hunter. Hunter has played multiple roles in Ward's life and has trained him since that first encounter. As a boxing trainer, Hunter instilled in him a style known as "hit and not get hit." This

[272] Maricela Cornejo (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, December 2017.

[273] Yessica Garcia Hernandez, "Sonic Pedagogies: Latina girls, mother-daugther relationships, and learning feminism through the consumption of Jenni Rivera" *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 28 (2016): 427-442.

style is also a metaphor for life, which can be understood as being intentional in the calculated risks one takes inside and outside of the ring in their attempts to both survive and thrive.

Ward's life can be described as a constant boxing match full of personal struggles that helped him develop resiliency to life challenges. Born to Madeline Arvie Taylor, a Black woman, and Frank Ward, a white man, Andre grew up in Hayward and North Oakland, California. Ward described his experience of being biracial as being pulled towards opposite ends, citing that the "White side would consider you Black, so you're not accepted on that side and a lot of times on the African American side you are not Black enough."[274] Throughout his youth, Ward's father raised him, as his mother was homeless and struggled with an addiction to crack cocaine. As Ward got older and progressed in his boxing craft, he experienced a personal struggle that served as an opportunity to continue his journey of growth. Like his mother, Ward's father also struggled with substance abuse and eventually checked into rehab for his heroin use, resulting in Virgil Hunter stepping in and becoming Ward's temporary guardian. Then in 2002, already recognized as a notable boxing prospect, Andre lost his father to a sudden heart attack. This triggered self-destructive behavior and a serious depression where he distanced himself from his friends, family, and faith, citing that he "was angry at God."[275] He gives credit to Virgil for helping him turn things around in time to qualify and eventually capture Olympic gold at the 2004 Athens games.

Between losing his father and acquiring sudden fame from his exposure at the Olympics, Ward turned to Pastor Napoleon Kaufman for guidance in renewing his faith in God. Pastor Kaufman is a former division-1 college athlete who played the running back position for the

[274] "My Fight: Kovalev/Ward – Full Show" uploaded by "HBOBoxing," October 31, 2016, retrieved March 5, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9UIPh4BX9Y.

[275] Brin-Jonathan Butler, "Andre Ward Fights to Avoid a Boxer's Bad Ending," last modified August 4, 2016, http://theundefeated.com/features/andre-ward-fights-to-avoid-a-boxers-bad-ending/.

University of Washington and professionally for the Oakland Raiders. In 2001, Kaufman retired from the NFL and opened The Well Christian Community church in Livermore, California, under the guidance of GateWay City Church in San Jose, California. The Wells Christian Community is described as a multiethnic, nondenominational church that centers Christ in their teachings. The church strives to provide a service that is obedient and not sacrificial, as informed by 1 Samuel 15:22-23 which states: "But Samuel replied: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king." In obedience to God, The Well Christian Community's structure is informed by strict Bible scriptures and does not "accept any spiritual experience as having come from the Holy Spirit that doesn't have a precedent in scripture. We do not accept any revelation, vision, dream, prophecy or discernment as truth, which contradicts Scripture, or cannot be verified by it."[276] For Ward's congregation, the idea of "truth" is found in the sacred teachings of the Christian Bible and functions as a referential lens to view the world.

Ward's commitment to his Christian subjectivity is reflected in his boxing nickname, a public identity he is known for. Many boxers have nicknames. Nicknames are catchy and creative and often function as a tool for marketers who use them to promote individual fighters and construct theatrical narratives based on their ring monikers. Ward's boxing nickname is "Son of God." Known simply by the acronym of "SOG," Ward was first christened with this name before turning professional. In an interview with *The Undefeated,* Ward explained that developing a

[276] "Our Vision and Beliefs," *The Well Church,* retrieved January 7, 2017, https://www.thewellchurch.net/who-we-are/our-vision-beliefs/.

nickname for himself was all about finding one that was a good fit. Names like the "terminator" or "destroyer" did not speak to him. He credits a nameless figure that told him he was the "Son of God." As a methodical individual, Ward researched the idea of being a "Son of God" in Bible scriptures. He came across Galatians 3:26, which states: "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith." This scripture provided depth, substance, and supporting evidence that justified and confirmed the use of "SOG" for Ward. He loved it because it was a name that he felt fit his character. He is mindful of his past struggles and honest about not always having believed in God, yet he gives credit to Christianity because he strongly feels that his "faith in God saved [his] life."[277] Through the intersection of boxing and his Christian faith, Ward describes attaching his nickname to his boxing trunks and clothing merchandise as a subtle way of communicating to the world that he is a believer in Christ. For Ward, there is no need to shout out his faith in God as he feels he can communicate that message in alternative ways.

Ward's musical selection goes beyond the purpose of packaging and promoting his athletic brand. I saw this first-hand while observing Ward during an open gym media workout at Virgil Hunter's boxing gym in Hayward, California. Specifically, I learned his life as a professional boxer melds together with his Christian values that inform his efforts to empower youth with a message of liberation. After he addressed the media, Ward began to unpack his gym bag to gather his gear for his workout. Though the question-and-answer portion of the media workout was over, figures of the media continued snapping photos and engaging with Ward in conversational fashion. I eventually saw an opportunity to ask a question of my own. I asked Ward if he knew which song he would be using for his ring entrance for his November 19, 2016 fight with Sergey Kovalev. Ward said he was not sure but informed me that the song selection was his decision to make. I

[277] "Andre Ward NOT Running from Golovkin and BET Takes on Boxing," uploaded by "SwaysUniverse," April 27, 2015, retrieved March 8, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBAThMe7fNg.

followed up by asking him what his musical selection meant for him. His response was simple: "I mean, you know sometimes I just try to go on what I'm vibin' to, because it has a good message or something."[278] His statement was further supported when he asked a member of his team to turn on his musical playlist. This playlist contained multiple songs by Christian Hip Hop artist, Bizzle, one of which he used for his November fight ring entrance as well as a methodological tool for teaching and empowering the youth who attended his open gym workout that day.

At the end of his workout, Ward made time to speak with Black and Brown youth from Camp Wilmont Sweeney, a fifty-bed minimum security residential program for adolescent males aged fifteen to nineteen.[279] Ward's way of empowering the youth was by creating a space of liberation through the methodological tool of Hip Hop. His musical choice to share with the youth was "Just Sayin" by Bizzle, a song that critiques materialism, the music industry's exploitation of young emcees, and encourages Hip Hop artists to use their platform in ways that enlightens and promotes positive change. Bizzle advocates for this when he says "Look, ya'll got too much influence to be actin' foolish, I don't care if you signed up to be a role model or not, Kids gon' follow you regardless."[280] As Ward deconstructed the song, he situated the track's message in a way that made the lyrics relatable to the experiences of the youth. He let them know that the prison system, which is connected to the group home system they were currently living in, is a business that uses young men's bodies for profit. Ward continued by saying that the young men that are exploited for the prison system's benefit are the same gifted individuals who can change the world

[278] "Is Andre Ward Voting for Clinton or Trump? Tells Reporter to Guess, But Does He Get it Right?" uploaded vby FightHype.com, November 1, 2016, retrieved January 8, 2017 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=555qOG8EYp0.

[279] "Programs & Services – Juvenile Facilities," *Alameda County Probation Department,* retrieved March 10, 2017, http://www.acgov.org/probation/ji.htm.

[280] "Bizzle Lyrics: Just Sayin," *AZ Lyrics,* retrieved May 17, 2017, http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/bizzle/justsayin.html.

by manifesting their passion and dreams. He then went on to create a space of self-expression by asking each of the twenty or so young men to share their passions and dreams with the group. During his hour-long engagement, Ward was precisely doing what he told the media earlier about how "He loves using the rejects." By "He," Ward was referring to how God has selected him and others to use their fame and influence to instill empowering messages of liberation.

By using a Christian Hip Hop song that "has a good message," Ward is drumming to the beat of James Cone, where he posits that "Black music is unity music" that unifies Black people to confront the truth of Black existence, affirms that Black being is possible in a communal context, and "moves the people toward the direction of total liberation."[281] Ward's message to the youth is one of liberation because it launches a "vehement attack on the evils of racism" that are alive and well in the system of mass incarceration and detention. Regarding mass incarceration, Michelle Alexander argues that it "emerged as a comprehensive and well-designed system of racialized social control that functions similar to Jim Crow."[282] It is through Bizzle's music that Ward can create a space of unity to teach youth about the prison-industrial-complex. His message to them about using their gifts and talents for good and to avoid becoming products of the incarceration business can be read as a strategy of liberation. It is through an awareness of the problem that roots one's oppositional consciousness and resistance to the power structures of prison detention in America. Ward's message to the youth was timely given that the Bureau of Justice reported that the likelihood of imprisonment for Black and Latino men born in 2001 is 1 in 3 and 1 in 6 (respectively) compared to 1 in 17 for white men.[283]

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[281] James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Obris Books, 1992), 5.

[282] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 4.

[283] Thomas P. Bonczar, "Prevalence of Imprisonment in the U.S Population 1974-2001," *U.S. Department of Justice* (2003): 1-12.

Beyond the confines of the gym, Ward also uses his ring entrance to create a sonic space of liberation. In his November 2016 fight, Ward entered the ring first as he was the challenger who was moving up in weight to fight Sergey Kovalev for his world light heavyweight championship belts.[284] Fans inside the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas eagerly waited for Michael Buffer to announce the beginning of Ward's entrance to the ring. The crowd erupted as Michael Buffer announced: "Now making his entrance to the ring, Andre 'SOG' Ward!" The big screens in the arena showed a confident Ward walking through the tunnel towards the ring. The sound of Bizzle's "King" was blasting through the speakers, a song that centers God as all mighty King that firmly conveys a "God over money" philosophy. "King" is a track in "Crowns and Crosses," Bizzle's sixth studio album that was written based off his life struggles with the intention to help others by providing them with an alternative truth.[285] This is the political context behind the song that Ward used for his ring entrance and the sonic space he created that night. Though Ward's process for selecting songs for his ring entrance consist of the positive message they contain, his selection of "King" suggests something larger. Bizzle's track provides a critique of a capitalist society when he states, "God over money boy, that's just my philosophy, as long as I am the realist I'm the richest automatically, game full of lies so they hating on my honesty, but Imma tell the truth till they body me."[286] Ward's use of this track functions as an anthem that represents alternative possibilities to the dominant narratives of capitalism, materialism, and false representations of the self. Through a "God over Money" philosophy, Ward creates a sonic space that centers liberation

[284] The championship belts on the line were the World Boxing Association, International Boxing Federation, and World Boxing Organization World Light Heavyweight titles.

[285] "Bizzle talks new album 'Crowns and Crosses,'" YouTube video posted by Revolt TV, November 7, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GulFRxcwEWM.

[286] "King: Bizzle," *Genius,* retrieved May 17, 2017, https://genius.com/Bizzle-king-lyrics.

through self-representation and promotes the dismantling of systems that attempt to commodify Black bodies through capitalist lies and greed rather than endorsing humanity and social justice.

Robert "The Ghost" Guerrero

Born and raised in Gilroy, California, Robert "The Ghost" Guerrero comes from a migrant agricultural family with roots in Mexico. He also comes from a strong lineage of boxers, noting that his grandfather Robert Guerrero and father Ruben Guerrero both boxed during their early years. Like Ward, Guerrero was first introduced to boxing at the age of nine and has been mostly trained by his father. Different from Ward, Guerrero opted to turn professional in 2001 at the age of 18 rather than wait to compete as an amateur at the 2004 Olympics. Guerrero had early success as a professional and amassed an impressive 16 wins and one draw record until he experienced his first defeat in 2005 against Gamaliel Díaz. No defeat is easy to process in this unforgiving sport, but the struggle that followed Guerrero after his first professional defeat was more immense than any kind of setback in prizefighting. Before his first defense of his International Boxing Federation featherweight title against Martin Honorio, Guerrero received the news that his wife, Casey Guerrero, had been diagnosed with Leukemia. Guerrero eventually went on to vacate his championship title to care for his wife while she battled cancer, putting his professional career temporarily on hold. She eventually had a successful bone marrow transplant and is cancer free today. Guerrero attributes God for blessing his wife with Katarina, the person who matched up with Casey's blood type for the much-needed transplant.[287] Though Guerrero was more vocal about his devotion to his Christian faith during this tumultuously time, it was not the first time that he had articulated Christianity as being central to his subjectivity.

[287] "Boxer Roberto Guerrero and Wife Battle Cancer," YouTube video posted by "SHOWTIME Sports," July 23, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBcSbjZRGVU.

Guerrero's parents raised him Catholic, making it a point to attend weekly Sunday mass services. His first encounter with a Christian church came at the young age of fifteen. His decision to visit a Christian church had more to do with his interest in his girlfriend and now wife, Casey, than an interest in learning more about this faith. For Guerrero, it was a way to "get in cool with [her] family."[288] In addition to learning about Christianity with Casey, he also notes his boxing manager playing a critical role in his early spiritual development. When he turned professional, he started studying the Bible with his manager, Bob Santos. This opened his eyes to "the true glory of God," and was baptized shortly after he became a professional boxer.[289]

At the time of our interview, Guerrero was a member of The Foothills Church located in Gilroy. The Foothills Church is a local church part of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, an evangelical Pentecostal Christian denomination that believes Jesus Christ is the Savior, Baptizer with the Holy Spirit, Healer, and Soon-Coming King.[290] Foursquare has a national and international presence, currently having more than 1,700 churches in the U.S. and over 66,000 churches and meeting places in 140 countries and territories.[291] The Foothills Church that Guerrero patronizes considers itself a safe place to worship God and is open to all peoples. Their mission is "to help people through biblical guidance to be in relationship with God, to be real with one another, and to be relevant to the world."[292] Their idea of "real" consists of being genuine in their worship and providing a "safe" place to praise God that is free of "prideful displays or personal

[288] Robert Guerrero, (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, December 20, 2016.

[289] Ibid.

[290] "What we Believe," *Four Square,* retrieved January 7, 2017, http://www.foursquare.org/about/what_we_believe.

[291] "About," *Four Square,* retrieved January 7, 2017, http://www.foursquare.org/about/history.

[292] "About Us," *The Foothills Church,* retrieved January 7, 2017, http://thefoothillschurch.org/about-us.

demonstrations aimed at drawing attention."[293] One of their desires is to be "real" like the early church, which is informed by Acts 2:46-47 which states: "Day after day, they met as a group in the temple and they had their meals together in their homes, eating with glad and humble hearts, praising God and enjoying the good will of all the people. And every day, the Lord added to their group those who were being saved."[294] The Foothills Church strongly believes in evangelism and salvation through grace. Through their church, they strive to "labor for the salvation of others, and work together to advance the Lord's Kingdom."[295] Advancing the Lord's Kingdom and sharing the word of God is something that Guerrero strives to do inside his ministry, which he considers to be within the boxing world.

In his 2006 fight against Gamaliel Díaz, Guerrero was already actively communicating his faith and love of God to the boxing world. In this event, Guerrero wore all read and white trunks with "Ghost" printed on the front of the beltline and "Acts 2:38" embroidered on the back. The "Ghost" part of his trunks is part of his boxing nickname. Though the nickname was given to him because of his hand speed and elusive movement inside the ring, Guerrero attributes the name to the Trinity, which holds God as being made up of the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit or Holy *Ghost*. His boxing nickname is reflective of who Guerrero is both as a believer in Christ as well as a prizefighter. Guerrero's nickname is an intentional part of his overall mission of using boxing as a platform to inspire people about the Lord. Well aware that his career as a fighter comes with a short lifespan, what matters most to Guerrero is sharing his faith with the world.[296] In an interview with Andrew Johnson from the *Huffington Post*, Guerrero stated that he

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[293] Ibid.

[294] Ibid.

[295] "What We Believe," *The Foothills Church,* retrieved January 7, 2017, http://thefoothillschurch.org/what-we believe/.

fights for the Lord and saw his upcoming fight with Danny Garcia in 2016 "as a platform to share his faith."[297] Not only has Acts 2:38 been embroidered on is boxing trunks as early as 2006, Guerrero also signed a deal with *Shoe Palace,* a U.S. retail company, before his 2013 premier boxing event with Floyd Mayweather Jr. Part of the deal included Guerrero shirts with The New Testament verse printed on them, reading: "Repent and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Guerrero's actions "about inspiring people about the lord"[298] through his Shoe Palace deal demonstrates an intersection of neoliberal colorblind Christianity and capitalism that promotes the sale of an evangelical message that goes unchallenged.

For Guerrero, the use of music in his ring entrance is intended to reach out to a particular audience to spread an evangelical message. Yet, his ring entrance nonetheless creates a sonic space of solidarity that is specifically salient on issues of immigration. On May 4, 2013, Guerrero faced the undefeated World Boxing Council World Welterweight champion, Floyd Mayweather Jr. As the challenger, Guerrero was scheduled to enter the ring first. There was a relative silence as fans in the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas awaited Guerrero's entrance. The fans were made aware of his entrance as Guerrero and his team appeared on the big screen walking through the tunnel and making their way to the ring. His attire consisted of his boxing trunks, gloves, and a shirt that read "God is Great." Seconds later, Los Tigres Del Norte "Jefe de Jefes" began to play through the speakers for all to hear, prompting Jimmy Lennon to announce, "and now making his

[296] "Robert Guerrero on faith, boxing and God," uploaded by "K-Love," May 3, 2013, retrieved January 10, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xrksI7-Ncs.

[297] Andrew Johnson, "The Boxer's Prayer," last modified January 22, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/andrew-johnson/the-boxers-prayer_b_9052686.html.

[298] "Robert Guerrero on faith, boxing and God," uploaded by "K-Love," May 3, 2013, retrieved January 10, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xrksI7-Ncs.

way to the ring, the interim champion from Gilroy, California, Robert 'The Ghost' Guerrero." Such a ring entrance can yield a plethora of interpretations. Understanding what the ring entrance means to Guerrero can better inform our interpretation of the sonic space that is created through Guerrero's choice of music.

During a visit to his boxing gym three years after this fight, I asked Guerrero what his ring entrance meant to him. Guerrero responded by saying he uses his "ring entrance to draw people in, sometimes you gotta cater to people, to bring them in." By "bring them in," Guerrero was referring to the idea that the boxing ring is his ministry. As his ministry, he uses his fame and platform as a boxer to spread a Christian gospel and bring fans closer to God. There is an element of intentionality in his ring entrance. On the one hand, Guerrero uses his platform and influence to promote an evangelical message rooted in colorblind Christianity. On the other hand, his ring entrance becomes a sonic space that centers Latina/o immigrant experiences, promotes solidarity, and disrupts the Department of Homeland Security that produced a record-breaking number of deportations in 2013 under the Barack Obama administration.[299]

Los Tigres del Norte is a Mexican band that plays norteño music. Gloria Anzaldua described norteño music as North Mexican border, Tex-Mex, Chicano, or *cantina* (bar) music.[300] Having started their musical career nearly five decades ago, Los Tigres del Norte have become the most beloved voices of migrant Mexican experiences. They have attended national immigrant rights marches in Los Angeles and performed their songs live during these political rallies. Their music, situated in these spaces of resistance, become anthems of protest and are forms of sonic

[299] Gonzalez-Barrera and Lopez, "U.S. Immigrant Deportations fall to lowest level since 2007," *Pew Research Center,* December 16, 2016, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/12/16/u-s-immigrant-deportations-fall-to-lowest-level-since-2007/.

[300] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999).

entitlements that resist the state's dehumanizing anti-immigrant policies and ideologies. For Guerrero, using Los Tigres's music is intentionally done so that he can speak to his Mexican and Latina/o fan base. He also feels he embodies the "Lord being a fisherman" metaphor because he uses music as a bait to bring people together so that he can communicate his evangelical message:

> God's blessed me with these different tools, to fish, to be a fisherman, to draw in the people. Music's one of them. Hearing the Tigres, gets people excited, they're watching me, they're watching me fight hard, they're watching me grind it out, and then afterwards they're sitting there watching me: *I just want to give the Glory to God*. One of the toughest sports, listening to the music they love, and to be able to just say: *I'm gonna put God first*. *Acts 2:38, to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus.* Plants that seed. Draws them in. To go in there and be that shining light. To all these people. Cater to what they like, draw them in, and slam them with that message, *put God first*. That's what I do with my ring entrances.[301]

Beyond connecting to his Mexican and Latina/o fans for an evangelical purpose, Guerrero's choice of music also creates a space that promotes liberation. Guerrero's sonic selection creates "a world of pleasure" that allows for the escape of the everyday threats of detention and deportation, cultivates a community built on unity and solidarity, and "plants seeds for a different way of living, a different way of hearing."[302]

2013 produced a record-breaking year of US immigrant deportations. According to a Pew Research report, there were 435,000 deportations under President Barack Obama, the most under any presidential administration.[303] Of those, 237,000 were non-criminal deportations, which

[301] Robert Guerrero, (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, December 20, 2016.

[302] Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 12. Found in Shana Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora,* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 8.

[303] Gonzalez-Barrera and Lopez, *U.S. immigrant deportations fall to lowest level since 2007,* last modified December 16, 2016, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/12/16/u-s-immigrant-deportations-fall-to-lowest-level-since-2007/.

accounted for more than half of total deportations in that year. This was the political terrain Guerrero and his ring entrance performance was situated in. In *Jefe de Jefes,* Los Tigres state:

Yo navego debajo de agua	I navigate the world underwater
Y tambien se volar a la altura	But I also know how to fly at height level
Muchos creen que me busca el gobierno	Many believe that the government is looking for me
Otros dicen que es pura mentira	Others say that it's simply a lie
Desde arriba nomas me divierto	From above, I just have fun
Pues me gusta que asi se confundan[304]	Well, I like to keep them confused

Though this song may be interpreted as telling the story of an established drug lord, my reading of the lyrics above situates the protagonist of this tale as a resilient and creative undocumented immigrant. Based on the theme of state surveillance found in the song, it can be said that the lyrics speak to the violence of U.S. immigration control and its enforcement of policing people deemed unfit for citizenship. As such, this song provides an alternative side to a story that centers immigrant experiences that continually navigate "debajo de agua," to evade the violent forces performed by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents. Despite living under the constant threat of immigration control, Los Tigres argue that undocumented immigrants find creative ways to "volar a la altura" and "desde arriba nomas me divierto." In other words, the lyrics of Los Tigres consist of the imaginative ways undocumented immigrants navigate state sanctioned violence and at the same time find ways to create alternative spaces of enjoyment and solidarity despite living in a world that constantly deems them as outsiders and racial and alien others. When situating Guerrero's choice of "Jefe de Jefes" within the 2013 political context of mass detentions and deportations, his ring entrance requires this alternative reading. Guerrero's ring entrance can be read as a call for liberation that is rooted and informed by his Christian subjectivity. Though his mission is to spread a gospel, his choice of music has an oppositional affect that does something

[304] "Letra 'Jefe de Jefes,'" *Musica,* retrieved May 17, 2017, https://www.musica.com/letras.asp?letra=886612.

larger than simply draw people in for Guerrero's evangelical message. Los Tigres may not be physically present with Guerrero during his ring entrance, but the politics of *los ídolos del pueblo* accompany him into the ring. And through this sonic space, a sense of solidarity is formed with fans as they collectively launch a one-two counterpunch combination of liberation and resistance against anti-immigrant racism and violence.

Though Ward and Guerrero create sonic spaces that promote unity and liberation, their political actions are not absent of their troubles. For Guerrero, it is his ascription to conservative Christian evangelical politics that may at times limit his understanding and reach of liberation. Though Ward's sonic intervention is powerful, a contradiction exists with his selection of Bizzle's music given that in 2014, he recorded a song that was fueled by a conservative Christian position on non-normative sexualities. The political actions and decisions these boxers make do not happen in isolation but more so are constantly in conversation with the structures of power found within the boxing industry and in the broader society. Their enactment of liberation and political expressions, whether intended or not, challenge systems of power that are rooted in their own struggles, which means that their political actions may promote freedom for some while displacing and misrepresenting others. As all social actors, these boxers are in the process of becoming, constantly implicated and challenged by their own ideological struggles and conceptualizations of liberation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that the songs selected by fighters for their ring entrances are rooted in their cultural subjectivities, lived experiences, and oppositional identities. I have given 12 examples of how the music that fighters select for their ring entrances help them express themselves as well as to disseminate hidden discourses that speak to resistance and disruption to

the hegemonic forces of race, ethnicity, gender, citizenship, and religion. These songs serve as a framing device for a fighter's creative expression of the self, political messages they intend to articulate, and disruptions to dominant structures and ideologies. As a marketing tool and way to become relatable to their fans, music is a way for fighters to make their mark and continue their stories and narratives. stic.man of Hip Hop duo dead prez described boxing and ring entrances as an art form likened to theater. For him, it is a form of story telling that requires music. This story telling is conducted by the fighters themselves, who are making decisions about the music they will share with the world. This music, which functions as a framing device to express their identities and political messages, demonstrates the creative agency that fighters have. "So, when a fighter is directing [their] story in that moment," stic.man states, "[they are] scoring [their] theme." As we begin to see how fighters score their themes and stories, we can also start to see the agency and creativity that it requires, especially when we can read the ways that prizefighters link their ring entrances to political messages that interrupt the power structures of race, ethnicity, class, gender, citizenship, and religion.

Chapter 4: "Una Adrenalina Muy Chingona": Boxers and The Significance of Their Entourages

When I decided to start having live drummers and singers, it wasn't just anybody, it was people that I kinda grew up hearing their voices…. Having them singing those ceremony songs or even just a victory song, and having the dancers, especially the jingle dress dancers of that healing dance on the beat of that drum and having them pave the way in prayer in the same state of mind before me, it just adds to the energy that I try to create myself. But I can't do it myself. I can go in the ring by myself, but I wanna make this something that everybody can connect to it.

-Kali "KO Mequinonoag" Reis[305]

Ring entrances are often a public demonstration of the multiple identities of a fighter, making them a rich site of study. Central to these performances of politics, fashion, and identity are the formulation of a boxer's entourage. From the characters and personalities most visible in a fighter's entourage to the process and meaning behind the choices that make them, entourages reveal worlds of history, tradition, politics, and identity. There is no previous scholarship on entourages in sport studies and ethnic studies, yet they are important to interrogate because they are central to ring entrances, and therefore to the performances of a fighter's self-expression. In this chapter, I will discuss the literature on athletic entourages, the innovator of boxing and sporting entourages, Sugar Ray Robinson, and George Lipsitz's and Barbara Tomlinson's conceptualization of accompaniment. Ultimately, I argue that fighters demonstrate creative agency through the formation and presentation of their entourages during their ring entrances. Entourages are a form of accompaniment that create new social relations, social realities, and cultural productions. These creations are projects of culture and knowledge production as well to not only perform their unique sense of self but to also make claims to sporting entitlements.

[305] Kali Reis (professional boxer) in discussion with Gaye Theresa Johnson and Rudy Mondragón, April 2019.

A Pro-Immigrant and Proud Entourage

José Ramírez's first defense of his WBC title took place at the Save Mart Center in Fresno on September 14, 2018.[306] The official attendance for his Friday night match against Antonio Orozco was 11,102. This number includes the 80 tickets that were purchased by Harris Enterprises for their agricultural workers who sat and cheered Ramírez on from sections 122 and 123 (Figure A). After all the preliminary matches had ended, I left my seat in the media section with my camera in hand and found a spot next to the barricade that separated me and the ring entrance path which Ramírez and his entourage were minutes away from walking through. After Orozco made his entrance to the ring, I witnessed Ramírez, and his entourage, wait patiently at the edge of the tunnel that bridges the dressing rooms to the boxing ring. Ramírez entered the ring second because he was the champion as well as the hometown hero. His ring entrance lasted no more than 90 seconds yet consisted of multiple deployments of expressive culture that coincided with his pro-immigrant and proud message.

FIGURE A. Boxing fans and agricultural workers from Harris Family Enterprises showing their support by wearing José Carlos Ramírez hats. Photo by Rudy Mondragón

As mentioned in chapter 2, Ramírez's pro-immigrant and proud message was specifically communicated through his use of fashion and style politics. When making such a powerful political statement, one needs to have a community that both believes in the message and agrees

[306] For this fight, I was able to secure a media pass from Top Rank Incorporated, Ramírez's promotional company. This granted me close access to the ring entrance walkway, which was less than five feet from where I was seated.

with it. Or at the very least, is willing to walk out with the fighter and their intended message His entourage consisted of famed boxing trainer Robert Garcia, manager Rick Mirigian, younger brother, political advisor Manuel Cunha, and the Fresno Fuego soccer team mascot. Garcia for example, has often said that he and Ramírez have similar backgrounds in the sense of having parents who worked in the agricultural fields after they immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico. Though he never worked in the fields, Garcia relates to Ramírez, stating,

> That's why with José, him growing up the same way, his parents working the fields. He worked the fields for a while too. That's why we connect very well. And he always ... The main thing about him is now that he's doing good, he's always doing something to help; with the water, with immigrants, whatever it is he's out there in Central California helping. That's why we connect so well, and it makes us work even harder.[307]

In being able to relate to Ramirez, Garcia suggests that it binds them closer to each other, which results in harder work inside the gym and during fights. Garcia, who walked alongside Ramirez during the night of this ring entrance, demonstrated not only his role as trainer within the entourage but also as supporter of a political statement that is salient with his and his family's immigrant lived experiences. Garcia expressed this publicly by wearing a black shirt that read "Pro-Immigrant and Proud." In addition to Garcia, Ramirez also walked to the ring with Manuel Cunha, who he described to me during our interview as a father figure and political advisor that is a "tremendous person who fights for immigration and the water rights" in the Central Valley.[308] In 2016, for example, Cunha was named the Agriculturist of the Year by the Fresno Chamber of Commerce and was noted as having a long history of lobbying for farmers. Robert Rodriguez of

[307] Robert Garcia (boxing trainer and former professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, September 2019.

[308] José Carlos Ramírez (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, January 2019.

the *Fresno Bee* wrote that in his 20 years of organizing, Cunha has been at the forefront of air quality, water rights, immigration reform, and government regulation issues.[309]

The formation of Ramírez's entourage (Figure B) speaks to a process that is dependent on, at the very least, an agreement by his team to accompany him to the ring while amplifying a message that refused racist and nativist ideologies in the era of the Trump presidency. Ramírez and his entourage become visible targets who communicate a message that explicitly rejects the political ideologies of Trump and his supporters, while signaling solidarity with those who have suffered under these long-term politics.

FIGURE B. José Carlos Ramírez's ring entrance on September 14, 2018 wearing a "Pro-Immigrant and Proud" shirt with Chuy Jr. (right). Photo by Rudy Mondragón

Literature Review on Entourages and Accompaniment

The literature on entourages in sport is restricted to amateur athletes who compete in the Olympics. In anticipation of the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, which was rescheduled to the summer of 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, literature emerged around the role, purpose, impact, and implications of athletes' entourages. Specifically, the existing literature on sporting entourages focuses on the need to further examine the topic as well as the role of entourages on athletic doping, body shaming, and as a form of coping. The International Olympic Committee for example, defines the athlete's entourage as comprising "all the people associated with the athletes,

[309] Robert Rodriguez, "Manuel Cunha of Nisei Farmers League named 2016 Agriculturist of the Year," last modified October 13, 2016, https://www.fresnobee.com/news/business/agriculture/article108076192.html.

including, without limitation, managers, agents, coaches, physical trainers, medical staff, scientists, sports organizations, sponsors, lawyers and any person promoting the athlete's sporting career, including family members."[310] For Olympic amateur athletes, an entourage is made up of a plethora of individuals who play a variety of different roles to support the athlete. Kennelly et al. and Lamont et al. have addressed how researchers have overlooked the role and experiences of entourages as well as called for situating entourages as heterogenous groups.[311] In their study of non-participating entourages (NPE) at participating sport events, Kennelly et al. adopt a phenomenological approach and stakeholder theory as an interpretive lens and argue that event experiences of NPEs warrant attention given that they largely make up the audience of sporting events and contribute to the economic and social impacts of host destinations. This study was largely targeted for a sport management and tourism audiences and suggested future practical research to focus on how unique aspects of the event design may positively or negatively affect entourages who support athletes.[312]

The literature has also focused on the role of entourages on athletic doping, body shaming, and coping. From a sport sciences perspective, Barkouis et al. suggested that an athlete's entourage can influence their doping related beliefs and behaviors.[313] Their qualitative study specifically focused on the role of coaches and peers and suggested that their findings provide valuable

[310] "Athlete's Entourage," retrieved June 13, 2021, https://olympics.com/ioc/athletes-entourage.

[311] Matthew Lamont, Millicent Kennelly, and Brent Moyle, "Perspectives of Endurance Athletes' Spouses: A Paradox of Serious Leisure," *Leisure Sciences* 41, no.6 (2019): 477-498 and Millicent Kennelly, Matthew Lamont, Peita Hillman, and Brent Moyle, "Experiences of Amateur Athletes' Non-Participating Entourage at Participatory Sport Events," *Journal of Sport and Tourism* 23, no. 4 (2019): 159-180.

[312] Millicent Kennelly, Matthew Lamont, Peita Hillman, and Brent Moyle, "Experiences of Amateur Athletes' Non-Participating Entourage at Participatory Sport Events," *Journal of Sport and Tourism* 23, no. 4 (2019): 159-180.

[313] Vassilis Barkoukis, Lauren Brooke, Nikos Ntoumanis, Brett Smith, and Daniel F. Gucciardi, "The Role of Athletes' Entourage on Attitudes to Doping" *Journal of Sports Science* 37, no. 21 (2019): 2483-2491.

information about the role of athletes' entourages in the formation of doping intentions and behaviors that can be utilized for future interventions on athlete doping prevention. McMahon et al. conversely, examined the role of entourages in contributing the psychological abuse in the form of body shamming. In looking at coaches, partners, parents, and team managers as members of an athlete's entourage, the researchers found that these four members perpetrate psychological abuse and physical neglect "through acts of body shaming and punishment" with the belief that it would repair and restore their athlete's body to an appropriate shape that would contribute to better competitive performance on the playing field.[314] This study also shows that entourages operate from "regimes of truth" in regards to rigid and fixed ideas of what an athletic body should look like. Finally, from a psychological perspective, Leisterer et al. examined entourages as an athlete's support network. Specifically, they looked at salutogensis, which outlines the management of stress and wellness, as a theoretical approach on how to cope with uncertainty. The purpose of this approach is to strengthen an athlete's sense of coherence (SoC), which the researchers suggest could be a suitable tool in sport psychology practice on how to use psychological skills to support and empower athletes. Overall, their study suggested there should be a focus on developing and reinforcing athletes' and their entourages SoC and world view to better support their mental health and sporting careers.[315]

The work of this scholarship in understanding these overlapping issues would be greatly augmented through literature on how entourages contribute and support athletes in creating new social relations, social identities, and politically expressing oneself. To better understand the role

[314] Jenny McMahon, Kerry R. McGannon, and Catherine Palmer, "Body Shaming and Associated Practices as Abuse: Athlete Entourage as Perpetrators of Abuse" *Sport, Education, and Society* (2021): 1-14.

[315] Sascha Leisterer, Franziska Lautenbach, Nadja Walter, Lara Kronenberg, and Anne-Marie Elbe, "Development of a Salutogenesis Workshop for SPPs to Help Them, Their Athletes, and the Athlete's Entourage Better Cope with Uncertainty During the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12, (2021): 1-12.

of a boxer's entourage in the ring entrance space, I draw from Barbara Tomlinson and George Lipsitz's analysis of insubordinate spaces and their use of the concept "accompaniment".[316] Tomlinson and Lipsitz argue that insubordinate spaces are "sites where people who lack material resources display great resourcefulness in deepening the capacity to free themselves and others from subordination, to imagine how things could be otherwise, and to move toward enacting that vision."[317] Acts of improvisation and accompaniment are found in these insubordinate spaces, which they define as political, cultural, and knowledge projects that fuel the creation of new social relations and social realities. When dealing with acts of social justice, accompaniment advances the idea about reciprocity, recognition, and co-creation in the construction of new social relations. Tomlinson and Lipsitz interrogate this aspect of insubordinate spaces in the realms of art, activism, academic research, and teaching. In this chapter, I build on their work and argue that sport is a necessary realm to interrogate when it comes to the role that accompaniment plays in boxing ring entrance performances and claims to sporting entitlements. A discussion about the role of accompaniment and boxing entourages cannot start without first addressing the story of Sugar Ray Robinson. As the innovator of boxing entourages, Robinson is an instructive example.

The Innovator of Boxing Entourages

Kenneth Shropshire credits Hall of Fame fighter Sugar Ray Robinson with creating the boxing entourage in *Being Sugar Ray,* his biography on Robinson. Born Walker Smith Jr. on May 3, 1921 in Detroit, Michigan, Smith was born to an impoverished family. He learned to box as a child in a nearby recreation center. In this recreation center, he trained alongside Joe "Brown

[316] See Chapter 5 for a more thorough use of this framework.

[317] Barbara Tomlinson and George Lipsitz, *Insubordinate Spaces: Improvisation and Accompaniment for Social Justice* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2019), 12.

Bomber" Louis, the eventual heavyweight champion who went on to earn the most consecutive title defenses (25 consecutive defenses) in all weight divisions. This record still stands today. Smith's parents broke up in 1932 and he and his two sisters moved with their mother from Detroit to New York City.[318] While in New York, Smith shot craps in Harlem, danced for change on Broadway Street, and became a regular on the New England bootleg boxing circuit under the guidance of well-known trainer, George Gainford.[319] According to Daniel A. Nathan, Smith used another fighter's boxing card for his first amateur fight. That fighter's name was Ray Robinson, a name Smith went on to use for the rest of his career. Before turning professional, Robinson earned 85 wins with no defeats and won the New York City Golden Gloves titles as a featherweight in 1939 and a lightweight in 1940. Robinson had his first professional fight that same year.

As a professional fighter, Robinson was a well-known "dandy" who wore expensive suits, cruised nightclubs, flirted with women, drove a flamingo pink and fuchsia Cadillac, and traveled with an encourage that included a golf pro, barber, valet, and manicurist.[320] Dandies are those who commit to the study of fashion that defines them as well as having an awareness of the trends around them.[321] Monica Miller's work on Black style and dandyism for example, examines its transformation over time and elucidates the history of Black dandyism in the "Atlantic diaspora as the story of how and why Black people became arbiters of style and how they used clothing and dress to define their identity in different and changing political and cultural contexts.[322] This idea

[318] Daniel A. Nathan, "Sugar Ray Robinson, the Sweet Science, and the Politics of Meaning," *Journal of Sport History* 26, no. 1 (1999): 163-174.

[319] Ibid.

[320] Ibid.

[321] Monica Miller, *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

[322] Miller, *Slaves to Fashion,* 1.

of Black dandyism and style intersects with the performative aspect found in an entourage because it pushed the boundaries of a collective self-expression as well as Black manhood. Shropshire referred to a 1951 *Times* magazine article that evinced the magnitude and size of Robinson's group that traveled with him overseas to Paris, France. The article quotes trainer Gainford, who said, "we just couldn't leave anybody, so we all came."[323] From that point on Robinson himself began to use the word "entourage" to describe his traveling party, which roots its contexts in an obligation and a responsibility to bring along friends and family who have themselves contributed and sacrificed towards the success of the athlete.[324] This notion is also found in how Tomlinson and Lipsitz describe "accompaniment" in similar cultural contexts. They posit that, "accompaniment is a disposition, a sensibility, and a pattern of behavior" committed to "making connections with others, identifying with them, and helping them."[325] In this chapter, I advance this type of conceptualization and understanding about ring entrances and the role a fighter's entourage plays in helping them make connections with their fans as well as assisting a fighter in their performances of self-expression and at times, political statements of justice.

To date, there is no literature that expands on the significance of Robinson and the role that a fighter's entourage plays in assisting them in creatively expressing themselves and co-creating new social relations and cultural productions. In the critical sport studies literature, a fighter's entourage is mentioned in passing or associated directly to Sugar Ray Robinson but is absent of deeper interrogation. Though it is absent in his work, Nathan does elaborate on the significance of Robinson and his deployment of a cool aesthetic. He argues that Robinson was a performer both

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[323] "Sugar in Paris," last modified January 1951. Found in Kenneth Shropshire, *Being Sugar Ray: The Life of Sugar Ray Robinson, America's Greatest Boxer and The First Celebrity Athlete (*New York: BasicCivitas, 2007), 155.

[324] Kenneth Shropshire, *Being Sugar Ray: The Life of Sugar Ray Robinson, America's Greatest Boxer and The First Celebrity Athlete,* (New York: BasicCivitas, 2007).

[325] Tomlinson and Lipsitz, *Insubordinate Spaces*, 23.

in and out of the ring who resisted inequality and oppression. Specifically, Nathan posits that "Robinson enacted a version of black masculinity that signified pride, self-worth, strength, and individualism, one that simultaneously embodied racial empowerment without representing a serious threat to the racial social order."[326] Though he only glosses over Robinson's creation of the sporting entourage, what is significant here is that Nathan does a deep alternative reading of how a boxer can perform resistance through conspicuous consumption, dandyism, and through forms of physical movement that represent social mobility and independence. Robinson's Cadillac for example, represented a creative and stylistic physical mobility that, according to Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson, epitomized African American class because of the cars reputation as well as big vehicles that take up space, which becomes important for those who have been invisible in this country.[327] These performances of Black manhood and dandyism took place around the middle of the 20th century, mostly in the city of Harlem. It is worth mentioning that engaging in dandyism was to an extent possible and less dangerous than engaging this stylistic performance in rural and less liberal places. And having a large entourage accompany Robinson everywhere he went also enacted a strategy of having power in numbers as a form of self-preservation and protection. What follows in this chapter is a deep reading of boxing entourages and the meaning behind the formation and deployment of them in ring entrances.

[326] Nathan, "Sugar Ray Robinson, the Sweet Science, and the Politics of Meaning," 168.

[327] Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson, *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America* (New York: Touchstone, 1992) found in Nathan, "Sugar Ray Robinson, the Sweet Science, and the Politics of Meaning."

Analysis on Ring Entrance Entourages

Serving a Purpose

A highly consistent theme in online articles and podcast episodes about boxers is the role, purpose, and functionality of the entourage. In Robinson's case, aside from the commonly discussed praise about his entourage being regarded as "a prototype for what is now commonplace among celebrity athletes,"[328] his entourage members also served specific roles and purposes in his career. According to Corey Kilgannon, the most important member of Robinson's entourage was Roger (last name unknown), his personal barber, who was responsible for maintaining Robinson's flattened, straightened, greased, and stylishly waved hair.[329] Bryant Keith Alexander for example, has discussed the importance of Black barbershops as they serve as cultural sites, discursive spaces, and confluence of banal ritualized activity and exchange of cultural currency.[330] Due to the traveling demands required of a professional boxers, Robinson's hiring of Roger as his personal barber and member of his entourage was his way of bringing the barbershop experience with him everywhere he went. Additionally, personal grooming and style is part of cultural performances that move an individual towards larger shared communities and affinities. Grooming and styling of hair is part of this barbershop social ritual as Kobena Mercer has argued that Black hair is never a forthright biological fact due to it always being groomed, prepared, cut, and worked on by human hands. Such practices, he argues, "socialize hair, making it the medium of significant statements about self and society."[331]

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[328] Corey Kilgannon, "Sugar Ray's Harlem, Back in the Day," last modified November, 2009, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/26/nyregion/26sugar.html.

[329] Ibid.

[330] Bryant Keith Alexander, "Fading, Twisting, and Weaving: An Interpretive Ethnography of the Black Barbershop as Cultural Space," *Qualitative Inquiry* 9, no. 1 (2003): 105-128.

[331] Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

Retired fighter Floyd "Money" Mayweather Jr. is known for having a large entourage as well. A member of that entourage commented on how serving on Mayweather's entourage is like a job opportunity. Specifically, he stated that a member of the entourage can be fired and let go if they fall "out of shape."[332] In other words, if a member of the entourage is not fulfilling their job responsibilities or misrepresenting the boxer, they run the risked of losing their job and being replaced within the entourage. For "Iron" Mike Tyson, his requirement for entourage members was the purpose and functionality they served him. Tyson recently shared this in his podcast, "Hotboxing with Mike Tyson." In this episode, he told retired football player Terrell Owens and his co-host and National Football League standout Sebastian Joseph-Day that "if [you have] people in your life [entourage] and they don't have a purpose, what the fuck they in your life for?"[333] At age 56, this statement is informed by Tyson's history of hangers-on who attached themselves to him early on in his professional career with the hopes of financially benefiting and utilizing the former heavyweight champion for their own gain.

In 2019, Joe Miles reported for The Sun that current heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua has a strong 23-man entourage that includes a football agent, ex-boxer security guard, right-hand man and confidant, and actor friend. Miles' article focuses on the different roles that entourage members served in Joshua's team, which also included strength and conditioning coach, business associates, marketing heads, nutritionist, videographer, social media manager, and friends.[334] These discussions in popular online articles and podcast episodes reveal the functions

[332] Marina Hyde, "Why an entourage is nothing without a dwarf," last modified April 16, 2008, https://www.theguardian.com/football/2008/apr/17/sport.comment#comment-2031899.

[333] "Terrell Owens, Greatest WR Ever | Hotboxin' with Mike Tyson," uploaded by Hotboxin' with Mike Tyson, April 14, 2021, retrieved June 1, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MqrTaQrSuM&t=4960s.

[334] Joe Miles, "Packing a Punch: Meet Anthony Joshua's 23-man strong entourage including football agent, ex-boxer security guard and actor pal," last modified December 5, 2019, https://www.the-sun.com/sport/128012/meet-anthony-joshuas-23-man-strong-entourage-including-football-agent-ex-boxer-security-guard-and-actor-pal/.

that entourage members serve. Yet, it is a knowledge that is taken for granted and brief and descriptive at best. Though a critical analysis and interrogation of sporting entourages are absent in the literature of critical sport studies and ethnic studies, there is nonetheless evidence of the importance of entourages that goes beyond entertainment, basic function, and the financial pitfalls of the athletes who sustain them. Drew Bundini Brown Jr. is a tremendous example of a unique purpose that an entourage member serves in assisting a fighter in creatively expressing themselves.

Brown was an assistant trainer and cornerman who joined Cassius Clay's (later changed his name to Muhammad Ali in 1964) entourage in 1963. Jonathan Eig, author of *Ali: A Life,* wrote that Brown was one of Clay's most important entourage members. Eig posits that Bundini, or *Bodini* as Clay and others pronounced it, was a ghetto poet and shaman who was either sent to Clay by Sugar Ray Robinson or by one of Robinson's entourage members.[335] Bundini was not a "yes man" and was known for challenging Clay, specifically telling him that "Elijah Muhammad was wrong, that white people were not devils, that God didn't care a thing about a person's color."[336] Bundini would be fired and rehired multiple times during Ali's career. Entourage members noted that Ali liked the arguments and debates he would have with Bundini. As a charismatic and creative figure, Bundini served the role of boosting and improving Clay's poetic outpost as his speechwriter. The trademark slogan "float like a butterfly, sting like a bee!" for example, was invented by Bundini, first appearing in newspapers in February 1964. Eventually and to this day, this masterful slogan is closely associated to Ali as the creator of the eight-word motto, yet it was Bundini, a member of his entourage, who came up with this poetic masterpiece. This motto is a cultural production that has made its imprint on the world. It is also an example of

[335] Jonathan Eig, *Ali: A Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017).

[336] Eig, *Ali*, 114.

what James Scott calls infrapolitics. Scott argues that infrapolitics are the tactical performances by subordinates that go beyond the visible end of the spectrum.[337] He links them to infrared rays because the creation and production of them, as is the case with this motto, too place behind the scenes and were invisible in large part by design given the creators awareness of power dynamics. We might not ever know the details about their arguments, but one can make the argument that the debates and arguments between Ali and Bundini, especially the ones that dealt with race and the Nation of Islam, were instructive and helpful in the lives of both men.

Robert "The Ghost" Guerrero is also a good example of having entourage members who have served the purpose of helping the fighter express themselves. As discussed in chapter 2, Guerrero performs a Christian subjectivity through the deployment of fashion and style in his ring entrance. This demonstration is directly connected to one of Guerrero's entourage members. In my interview with Guerrero, he shared that his parents raised him Catholic. He and his family would go to Catholic service every Sunday morning. Guerrero first started going to a Christian church at the age of 14 because his girlfriend and eventual wife, Casey. Initially, Guerrero's motives for going to church with Casey was to "get in good" with her family. Later in his teen years, Bob Santos, who eventually became his manager and member of his entourage, would take the time to sit down with Guerrero and read the Bible with him. Guerrero credits Santos as the person who opened his eyes to Christianity and as a result, "started getting in depth, started learning, seeing the truth and glory of God and went from there and my faith just took off."[338] Guerrero also credits Santos as the reason he was baptized. As a member of his entourage, Santos serves the role of

[337] James C. Scott*, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

[338] Robert Guerrero, (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, December 20, 2016.

manager but also as a spiritual advisor that is connected to Guerrero's abilities of expressing his religious beliefs during his ring entrances.

Mexican Ethnic Performances

Lipsitz and Tomlinson posit that the idea of accompaniment is not a generally valued practice in the activities of a competitive neoliberal society.[339] This is evident in boxing given that it functions under the pretense of a neoliberal multicultural society where race, ethnicity, class, and gender are operationalized as identities that can be monetized based on how closely they align to potential markets. These markets are what drives the sales of tickets and viewership for boxing. Mikko Mabanag is the marketing manager at Churchill Boxing gym in Santa Monica. The gym was founded by American actors Peter Berg and Mark Wahlberg. As the marketing manager, Mabanag is charged with spearheading marketing campaigns for the professional boxers who train out of Churchill. In my interview with Mabanag, we discussed the career of Mexican born boxer Alex Saucedo. In a subsequent conversation with Saucedo, I learned that he thought often about his future ring entrances. He shared that if he could select anyone to accompany him to the ring, it would be Mexican wrestling star Rey Mysterio. He continued saying that rather walking to the ring with his entourage, he would have a lowrider vehicle where he and Mysterio would ride to the ring together.[340] Saucedo's imagination of a future ring entrance speaks to his creativity and intentionality in making his ring entrance speak to his Mexican ethnic identity. Mysterio is a Mexican wrestler who was born in San Diego and started his wrestling career in Mexico's lucha libre circuit, eventually crossing over into the World Champion Wrestling (WCW) and World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE). Mysterio is known for his signature lucha libre style masks that

[339] Tomlinson and Lipsitz, *Insubordinate Spaces.*

[340] Alex Saucedo, communication during participant observation, September 2019.

express a Mexican aesthetic. Furthermore, Saucedo's idea of entering the ring in a lowrider also speaks to a Mexican ethos. For example, Denise Sandoval's work on lowriders argues that they are living history of the Mexican American experience in the United States since the early 1940s when Pachucos and Pachucas cruised the boulevard.[341]

On the one hand, a ring entrance with such an entourage speaks to a boxer's desire to express himself ethnically and culturally in a proud and dignified manner. On the other, boxing is a business that relies on generating fanbases and securing markets. When I asked Mabanag what he thought about Saucedo's idea from a marketing standpoint, he stated:

> Oh, that's perfect because, first, Alex is Mexican. That's one. Second, the reason why he chose Rey Mysterio because he's Mexican and... yeah, it's perfect for him because it continues, like what I said, it continues his story. It continues his story and, once he enters with that lowrider or enters with Mysterio, what will people do? They will look at him. It gives you that extra inch. It gives you that, what do you call this? Fear factor or showmanship. So yeah, the two points: branding and your showmanship. And showmanship can have so many subcategories to it. Showmanship is your fear factor.[342]

As marketing manager of fighters like Saucedo, it is crucial that fighters "continue their story," which for Mabanag (as discussed in chapter 3) means creating a consistent story that coexists with a fighter's brand. Mabanag argued that continuing their story for a fighter is done through their musical selection. In Saucedo's case, it can also be done through the careful and strategic selection of own's entourage (Rey Mysterio) and a symbol of Mexican culture (lowrider vehicle). What Saucedo is envisioning is the forging of an ethnically and culturally Mexican sporting entourage that speaks to an accompaniment rooted in the creation of new affinities, affiliations, and alliances

[341] Denise Sandoval, "The Politics of Low and Slow/Bajito y Sauvecito: Black and Chicano Lowriders in Los Angeles, from the 1960s through the 1970s," in *Black and Brown in Los Angeles: Beyond Conflict and Coalition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

[342] Mikko Mabanag (Marketing Manager of Churchill Boxing Gym) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, September 2019.

with his Mexican fanbase. A great example of a fighter using a symbol of Mexican culture is Jorge Arce and Fernando Vargas, which I discuss next.

On January 27, 2007, Jorge "El Travieso" Arce took on Julio David Roque Ler in a World Boxing Council Super Flyweight title eliminator match. Arce was expected to win this match to set up an eventual shot at a world championship title. He went on to win the bout comfortably on all three judges scorecard. When the stakes are not that high in terms of quality of opponent, there is less pressure on the fighter and it poses an opportunity for the fighter to enter the ring in an elaborate and spectacular way. Arce, who was born in Los Mochis, Sinaloa, Mexico, did not disappoint as he entered the ring in his trademark black cowboy hat and sucking a cherry lollipop while riding a live horse. When he first started boxing, Arce would get nervous before fights and was told that a lollipop would help curb the nerves. In terms of his hat, he told Top Rank Inc. that he "started wearing the hat the last few years. The people where I'm from in Sinaloa, everybody wears those hats. It identifies me, where I come from. I also wear a rosary that I put on myself. It is a gold one that my mother gave me."[343] During this ring entrance, Max Kellerman, who currently works for ESPN, was ringside calling the fight for HBO Boxing After Dark. It was Kellerman who not only commented on Arce walking into the ring on the horse but also the fact that the horse was dancing. He told his ring side colleague and former heavyweight champion "Lennox [Lewis] the horse is dancing, it's not just walking in, its dancing in!"[344] What Arce was doing was deploying a cultural performance of charreria, a term that translates to "Mexican cowboy," which signifies lo Mexicano (Mexicanness) since the aftermath of the Mexican revolution (1910-1920) as both art and sport (charreria) and the Mexican rodeo (charreada). Laura Barraclough's work on charros for

[343] "Jorge Arce Bio," last modified April 19, 2012, https://www.toprank.com/all-news/jorge-arce-bio/.

[344] Ibid.

example, contends that "ethnic Mexicans in the United States have mobilized the charro in the service of civil rights, cultural citizenship, and place-making since the 1930s."[345] In this case, the horse that Arce rode in on for his ring entrance is a member of his entourage that allows this Sinaloense boxer to perform a cultural citizenship rooted in a Mexican art and sporting tradition.

When I asked Max Kellerman what he thought the ring entrance did for Arce's Mexican and Mexican American fanbase, he stated:

> I suppose if you're a working-class Mexican boxing fan or a Mexican-American boxing fan even, or if you're someone from Arce's region, a lot of fighters come from that region and you root for them, whatever, but they become anonymous like you if they're just a fighter. And when someone like Arce comes into the ring like that, he's defining his character as an individual. And so you can live vicariously through him.[346]

Here, Kellerman is saying that Arce walking into the ring in this fashion connects his lived experience with a Mexican and Mexican American boxing fan base that can relate on the bases of a shared regional, cultural, and class experience. He also expressed that the fans who were present at this fight can identify themselves with the boxer and live vicariously through him. For the duration of the ring entrance as well as during the fight, Arce's fans can create their own versions of cultural citizenship and belonging because their lives feel closely aligned to the Mexican fighter. Performances like these are not always embraced by fans as reactions to them can be informed by xenophobia and anti-Mexican and anti-immigrant sentiments. Barraclough's work reminds readers of a young Sebastian De La Cruz, known as "El Charro de Orro," who was called a "wetback," "beaner," and "illegal," for singing the national anthem before game three of the NBA finals in 2013 while dressed in a charro outfit.[347] While it is unclear if fans had similar xenophobic

[345] Laura Barraclough, *Charros: How Mexican Cowboys are Remapping Race and American Identity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 2.

[346] Max Kellerman (ESPN) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, April 2019.

[347] Barraclough, *Charros.*

sentiments of Arce's ring entrance that happened six years earlier, what is clear is that he entered the ring in a way that countered American sensibilities. With the help of a dancing horse, Arce entered the ring exuding Mexican pride, dignity, and joy that was contagious to all his fans on that January night in Anaheim, California.

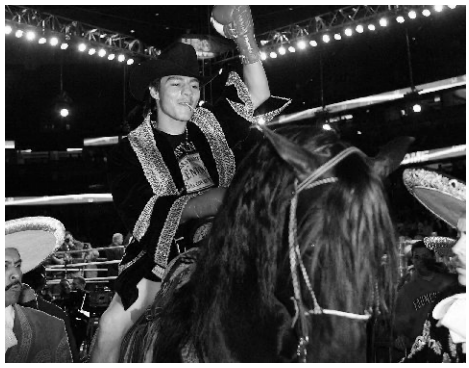

FIGURE C. Jorge Arce's ring entrance on January 27, 2007, riding a horse.
Photo retrieved from Martin Mulcahey's Twitter account

Fernando "El Feroz" Vargas is another example of how a boxer will assemble an entourage to help them express a Mexican ethnic identity. When Vargas fought Oscar De La Hoya for example, he was portrayed with a "gangsta style" persona in relation to his opponent who was regarded as the clean cut American Mexican. When he entered the ring to fight against De La Hoya on September 14, 2002, Vargas walked as the proverbial heel. As the heel or "bad guy," Vargas performed a loud and unapologetic Mexican subjectivity that also centered his racial brownness. He was able to do this with an entourage that served both a musical purpose and represented a symbol of Mexican identity. As the challenger, Vargas entered the ring first and selected a song that was performed by his friend, Samuel Hernández. As mentioned in the introduction, I first thought his ring entrance song for this fight was sung and performed by Mexican idol Vicente Fernandez. When I sat down for an interview with Vargas, he corrected me and said he wanted to give his friend Hernández, who was in the early stages of his musical career, an opportunity to perform on a world stage. This story said a great deal about Vargas, who at the time was presented

by the media as a thug and gangsta who lacked gentlemanly qualities. It also spoke to collectivity and a sharing of his celebrity platform to provide his friend with the largest musical stage in his career to that point, an action of accompaniment that disrupts the values of individuality found in neoliberalism. Hernández performed "No Me Se Rajar" (I don't know how to quit) for approximately two minutes and twenty seconds, as Vargas walked towards the ring with his entourage. The song was also customized to incorporate Vargas into the lyrics:

> Yo soy de los otros, que no teme nada, mi llamo *Fernando* y no me se rajar!
>
> I am not like the others, who fears nothing, my name's *Fernando* and I don't know how to give up!

The lyrics here demonstrate a value in boxing that is often associated to the best Mexican boxers of all time. It is an ethos of never quitting in the ring and fighting till the death if need be. This value is often associated with Julio César Chávez, who is regarded as one of the best boxers of all time and is a strong symbol of lo Mexicano (being Mexican). Vargas chose to also have this great champion be part of his ring entrance entourage.

Vargas first met his idol Chávez when he was a teenager in high school. For Vargas, Chávez is an important boxing figure and marker of Mexican identity given that "he represented Mexico and represented the Mexican people."[348] Born in Culiacán, Mexico, Chávez was the biggest name in recent Mexican boxing history prior to the rise of De La Hoya and Vargas.

[348] Fernando Vargas (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, March 2019.

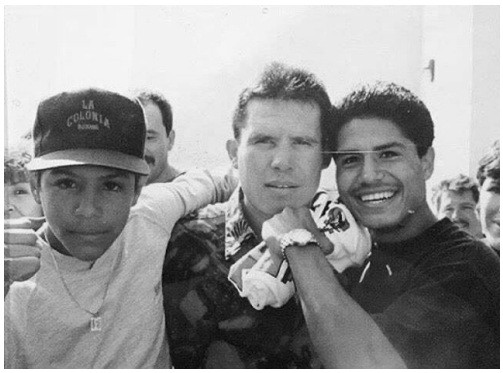

FIGURE D. A young Fernando Vargas (left) with Julio César Chávez (center) and Robert Garcia (right)

Associating himself with Chávez was a personal and political move because it was Vargas's way of arguing that he was the more relatable representative of Mexican American identity in relation to De La Hoya. HBO announcer Jim Lampley expressed an essentialist judgment during Vargas's ring entrance when he stated, "Chavez, as Larry Merchant pointed out, is a symbol to Mexican American and Mexican fans of Vargas's solidarity with his machismo heritage."[349] This example shows not only the disapproval of Vargas's performance but also reduces and essentializes his cultural heritage and race to one of hypermasculinity, failing to address the role US patriarchy plays in understanding non-white masculinities. However, what Vargas did was create his own theatrical script that centered him as the unapologetic and proud Mexican American hero despite the publicity that was framed against him as the bad boy of boxing. Personally, it was also Vargas's wish to defend his idol. In 1996 and 1998, De La Hoya fought and beat Chávez. For Vargas, De La Hoya took advantage of an aging and past his prime Chávez and he wanted to bring Chávez with him to the ring so his idol could watch him beat De La Hoya for "taking advantage of his idol Chávez and beating him twice. You just don't do that to a legend like my idol, the great Mexican champion, Julio César Chávez" (Quise que mi idolo viniera hoy para que mirara lo que iba hacer

[349] "Oscar De La Hoya vs. Fernando Vargas (9-14-2002) Complete Fight," uploaded by "BoxingBananas," October 19, 2014, retrieved June 2, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yJRuFbhktM.

hoy y ganar esta pelea por, por que Oscar tomó ventaja de el por que ya estaba viejo y le peleo dos veces y ese no se hace a una leyenda como mi idolo gran Mexicano Julio César Chávez).[350] Though Vargas was not able to beat De La Hoya that night and make good on his promise, he is still remembered for walking to the ring with Chávez and regarded as a Mexican warrior who always gave his best effort in the ring for his legion of fans.

Spirit of Mardi Gras Indians

The idea of warrior is commonly associated with professional boxers. In the case of Regis "Rougarou" Prograis, the theme of heroic warrior boxer is closely associated to the Mardi Gras Indian's and their narratives of resisting domination. Prograis is a professional boxer from New Orleans. In August 2005, at the age of 16, Prograis and his family were forced to move when Hurricane Katrina struck. He ended up in Houston, Texas and eventually found a home in the city's Savannah Boxing Club.[351] This was not your ordinary gym as it was also home to hall of fame heavyweight legend, Evander "Real Deal" Holyfield. Despite being forced to leave New Orleans, Prograis has been very intentional about integrating his regional, cultural, and historically identities into his boxing story. "Rougarou," for example, is his ring name that borrows from Cajun folklore found in New Orleans. According to Imani Shani Afiya Altemus-Williams, Rougarou is traditionally described as a werewolf figure that lives in the Bayous and functions as a unifying force that brings Black and Native Americans from the region together.[352] It is also said that the folklore of the Rougarou was used as a Catholic disciplining force, with stories that posited that

[350] Fernando Vargas (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, March 2019.

[351] Jonathan Wells, "Regis Prograis reveals how to get the body of an elite boxer," retrieved June 3, 2021, https://www.thegentlemansjournal.com/article/regis-prograis-reveals-how-to-get-the-body-of-an-elite-boxer/.

[352] Imani Shani Afiya Altemus-Williams, "The Art of Survivance: Sacred Land, Story Telling and Resistance in Louisiana," (master's thesis, Sámi University of Applied Sciences, 2018).

the Rougarou would hunt children down if they broke their Lenten promise.[353] Prograis first wore the mask in his 10th professional fight in 2014 and it represents a southern Louisiana and Cajun history. Four years later, Prograis had a ring entrance that utilized a massive entourage that allowed him to creatively center and perform a New Orleans Mardi Gras Indian subjectivity.

FIGURE E. Regis "Rougarou" Progais with a tattoo that represents his home city of New Orleans. Photo by Rudy Mondragón

On July 14, 2018, Prograis entered the ring with an entourage that consisted of the Free Agents Brass Band, Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club, Carrollton Young Hunters Indians, and the Mohawk Hunters Indians. The ring entrance was staged at the Lakefront Arena in New Orleans and ran for almost a minute. When I spoke to Tony Flot, a member of Prograis's entourage, he shared with me that the confirmation of the Free Agents Brass Band had been made on the same day as the fight. It was a last-minute confirmation that was done to bring an additional element to Prograis's ring entrance that could help him express a New Orleans tradition that dates to the late 19th century. The addition of a Mardi Gras parade to his ring entrance, which consisted of an entourage of men wearing colorful and elaborate costumes and flags, accompanied Prograis while blowing whistles, singing, and chanting. According to George Lipsitz, Mardi Gras Indian tribes not only express utopian desires but also "coded expression to values and beliefs that operate every

[353] Ibid.

day in the lives of Black workers in New Orleans."[354] Historically, Black slaves in New Orleans intermingled with Indians, which gave many Louisiana Blacks a historical claim to a joint Indian and Afro-American heritage.[355] The performances of Mardi Gras Indians, which was on full display during Prograis's ring entrance, speaks to a performance and rehearsal of accompaniment that is rooted around self-affirmation, solidarity, and resistance to the racial and class oppression in everyday New Orleans life. At the surface, this ring entrance can be read as a spectacular multicultural performance intended to further promote a New Orleans prizefighter. Yet, as José Limon argues, popular self-generating cultural expressions and performances can challenge the hegemony of dominant commercial culture.[356] Prograis's ring entrance, with the help and accompaniment of a New Orleans brass band and Mardi Gras Indian entourage, created a performance that contained political and cultural meaning specific to region, race, ethnicity, and culture.

A Blackcentric Digital Entourage

On February 22, 2020, Deontay "Bronze Bomber" Wilder teamed up with hip hop artist D Smoke and creatively utilized technology to create a multigenerational entourage that centered Blackness and Black pride in his ring entrance. Not only was Wilder's outfit (See Chapter 2) for this fight a representation of Blackness, but Wilder also utilized the deployment of music that also functioned as an extension of his entourage. Wilder entered the ring first on this night. At the front of his ring entrance entourage was Daniel Anthony Farris, known professionally as D Smoke, a Black American rapper and songwriter from Inglewood, California. D Smoke was to perform

[354] George Lipsitz, "Mardi Gras Indians: Caarnival and Counter-Narrative in Black New Orleans," *Cultural Critique* no. 10 (1988): 99-121, 102.

[355] Lipsitz, "Mardi Gras Indians."

[356] José Limón, "Western Marxism and Folklore," *Journal of American Folklore* 96, no. 379 (1983): 34-52.

"Black Habits," a song from his debut album of the same name that had just been released two weeks prior to the night of the fight. D Smoke stood alone as the camera's zoomed in on him as he waited at the entryway of the ring entrance space, where all the fans inside the MGM Grand Garden Arena could see him. As a prelude to a live performance of "Black Habits," D Smoke performed a spoken word poem about Wilder. This poem centered Wilder as a boxer with agency who uses his boxing platform to intentionally influence social change. With conviction and confidence, D Smoke stated:

> A legend was born in Tuscaloosa and pledged these days to lay a pavement for brighter futures. Set ablaze like lighter fluid, he fights the ruthless. They tried to beat him and can't defeat him. Their fight is useless. Cause on the canvas landed every man that stood in his way. And he's still devastating opponents. Til' this day![357]

Part of Wilder's claims to sporting entitlements is his centering of Blackness and Black manhood in a ring entrance through the deployment of hip hop culture. It is a form of sonic spatial entitlement, which Gaye Theresa Johnson has described in the context of youth engaging in the politics of resistance through hip hop music by bringing attention and articulating the crimes of police violence that they witnessed.[358] When it comes to hip hop music, the melodic and lyrically rich content presented in this spoken word narrative and "Black Habits" track allows Wilder to not only use sound and music as a framing device for his unapologetic claims to sporting entitlements but also through the accompaniment of D Smoke.

Given the intricacies and complex layers found in music, D Smoke's spoken word narrative and rap song contain Blackcentric messages that mediate the relationship fans have with Wilder as well as providing purpose and context for the reclamation of a ring entrance space as one of

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[357] Deontay Wilder's Ring Walk ahead of heavyweight title fight vs. Tyson Fury | PBC ON FOX," PBC ON FOX February 23, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2Pi4T7weiQ.

[358] Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity.*

sporting entitlements. Shana Redmond argues that Black anthems, no different than D Smoke's Black Habits, construct a sound franchise, which she argues "is an organized melodic challenge utilized by the African descended to announce their collectivity and to what political ends they would be mobilized."[359]

The power found in D Smoke's performance that night was amplified by juxtapositions between his track Black Habits and the responses from people inside the arena. As D Smoke concluded his spoken word narrative of Wilder, he dropped his arms to his sides and waited for the beat to commence as a signal to start his performance. The first part of the song pays homage to other Black artists who have influenced his creative being, which include Prince's and Jimi Hendrick's song "Purple Rain" and Stevie Wonder's "Songs in the Key of Life" album. He also introduces himself in the track and situates himself regionally to Inglewood, California and pays his respects to Afeni Shakur, the mother of iconic west coast rapper Tupac Shakur, who he acknowledges as paving the way for artist like him, who in the present moment have "all eyez on me."[360] As the first part of the track comes to a close, D Smoke raps,

> If you swung back when you faced with a challenge, that's meant to break you, and balanced the scales, you ain't average, now throw your hands on three, go on and put em' up for Black Magic, Black Excellence, Black Habits, this Black medicine, everything Black.

As the performance goes on, we can see a Black man behind D Smoke's left shoulder, who is wearing a headset and credentials around his neck. He is clearly on the job, yet he is subtly engaging with the music made evident by bobbing his head in alignment with the beat of the song. As D Smoke paints a vivid picture of overcoming adversity and validating people as beyond average, he calls on the crowd to throw their hands up in three to celebrate all things Black. In call

[359] Redmon, *Anthem,* 4-5.

[360] "All Eyez on Me" is a 1996 album and song by Tupac Amaru Shakur, also known by his stage name 2Pac.

and response fashion, the Black man working and bobbing his head throws up his right fist in the air and holds it for at least five seconds. The video of the ring entrance then transitions to a visual representation of Deontay Wilder and his entourage. Here, we see a serendipitous juxtaposition between D Smoke's lyrics and the first image of Wilder in his warrior couture suit that was custom made by Donato Crowly and Cosmo Lombino (See Chapter 2). The video that fans saw in the arena and at home on their television sets presented a juxtaposition of a Black superhero image of Wilder and D Smoke's lyric that stated, "this Black medicine, everything Black."[361] And as that took place inside the arena, fans erupted in enthusiastic and joyful cheers for their fighter.

As Wilder walked to the ring with his entourage, fans also saw giant video monitors that stood alongside the ring entrance path. The monitors highlighted Black Power Movement, civil rights, artists, and athletic figures of the past. The monitors were on Wilder's left side and specifically showcased Frederick Douglas, Nispey Hussle, Harriet Tubman, Kobe Bryant, Maya Angelou, Jackie Robinson, Martin Luther King Jr., Muhammad Ali, and Rosa Parks. The use of technology here speaks to Wilder's innovative spirit and imaginative use of technology to creatively curate a multigenerational entourage that consisted of the people he wanted to honor during Black History Month. As a curation of a Blackcentric virtual entourage, Wilder was intentional in forming connections with historical figures that he felt an obligation to for paving the way for him. In a Yahoo Sports article, Wilder told boxing journalist Kevin Iole that he "wanted my tribute to be great for Black History Month. I wanted it to be good and I guess I put that before anything."[362] Here, Wilder is reflecting on the aftermath of his elaborate ring entrance and eventual

[361] "Deontay Wilder's Ring Walk ahead of heavyweight title fight vs. Tyson Fury | PBC ON FOX," PBC ON FOX February 23, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2Pi4T7weiQ.

[362] Kevin Iole, "Deontay Wilder says 40-pound costume left his legs dead in a seventh-round TKO loss to Tyson Fury," last modified February 24, 2020, https://sports.yahoo.com/deontay-wilder-says-40-pound-costume-left-his-legs-dead-in-a-seventhround-tko-loss-to-tyson-fury-215534451.html.

loss to Tyson Fury. His intention was clear in terms of centering Black History Month first and foremost. There is a great deal of value in Wilder's curation of a pluralistic virtual entourage because it uses Tomlinson and Lipsitz's idea of accompaniment to disrupt the activities and dominant ways of thinking in a neoliberal society. In other words, Wilder's claim to sporting entitlements is one of the pluralistic "we" versus neoliberal individualistic "me." And in a sport that privileges the rise and fall of a single boxing hero, Wilder's ring entrance communicates a collectivity, both in victory and defeat.

Conclusion: Implications of the Boxing Entourage

In this chapter, I have discussed the literature on athletic entourages, the innovator of boxing and sporting entourages, Sugar Ray Robinson, and George Lipsitz's and Barbara Tomlinson's conceptualization of accompaniment. Ultimately, I argued that fighters demonstrate creative agency through the formation and presentation of their entourages during their ring entrances. Entourages are a form of accompaniment that create new social relations, social realities, and cultural productions. These creations are projects of culture and knowledge production as well to not only perform their unique sense of self but to also make claims to sporting entitlements. Some of the examples I have discussed here are include the purpose and function that entourage members serve in a fighter's ring entrance. I have also demonstrated how an entourage can assist the fighter in creatively expressing their racial, ethnic, and religious identities as well as connecting with fans across class and immigrant status.

There are also implications to a boxer's entourage that emerged in my research. These implications specifically deal with the finances and economic hardships that accompany a fighter who tries to financially sustain their entourages. Despite the fame and popularity of his innovation of the boxing entourage, Sugar Ray Robinson was often left to pick up the tab and check for

members of his entourage. For example, Robinson once pocked nearly $50,000 from fighting, stating that he "needed every penny" after his "entourage had run up a big bill at the Claridge and Edna Mae had been shopping"[363] This took place when Robinson fought multiple fights in Europe. More recently, Fernando Vargas shared with me that having a large entourage might have been his downfall. Vargas did not mean downfall in a negative way, but more so a lesson he learned about how expensive it is to maintain an entourage after one acquires so much money and fame:

> I brought my boys, my friends with me, and you know I would, 'Oh, I got this. I'll pay for this, I'll pay for that. I'll pay for that.' You know what I mean? Which, it's something that I'm gonna tell my kids to never do. You know, because at the end of the day, they're not - I can count my friends on one hand.[364]

For Vargas, his experiences with his entourage are tragic tales that now serve a purpose for him as he can use them to teach his three sons, who are all boxers, how to navigate the world of boxing. Vargas stresses to his children that once they start making money and gaining fame, there will be people who will try to attach themselves to them. Vargas calls them "yes men," entourage members who are there to stroke the fighter's ego and, in the process, try to financially benefit for themselves from the fighters' earnings. With the difficulties and struggles that he had with his entourage, Vargas hopes that those lessons will better serve his children as they embark on their own professional boxing careers.

Further research is needed in this area of sport as an athlete's entourage can provide important insights. This is particularly true when we thinking about athlete activists who utilize their platforms to amplify social justice issues. Behind the scenes, the role of an entourage for an

[363] Nick Parkinson, "The story of Sugar Ray Robinson's Christmas Day tune-up," last modified December 24, 2016, https://www.espn.com/boxing/story/_/id/18343160/the-story-sugar-ray-robinson-christmas-day-tune-fight-hans-stretz.

[364] Fernando Vargas (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, March 2019.

athlete activist can yield insightful information about the social processes and collective efforts that manifest prior to an athlete making a political statement before, during, and after athletic competition. As Tomlinson and Lipstiz argue, accompaniment is an important crucible for a new social warrant because solidarity is not found but forged.[365] In other words, interrogating the formation of an athletic entourage can demonstrate a social process that is rooted in resistance and dissent rather than simply a group of hangers-on who serve no role or purpose for an athlete. At the same time, I am not advocating that revolution or social movements are created and birthed in a fighter's entourage. Yet, the social processes and social and cultural relations and productions that boxers create with their entourages and in their celebrity platforms do contribute to the larger social movements that are spread out across the nation and world.

[365] Tomlinson and Lipsitz, *Insubordinate Spaces.*

Chapter 5: Boxing Ring Entrances as Insubordinate Spaces: A Disruptive Sporting Oral Herstory

In *Insubordinate Spaces,* Barbara Tomlinson and George Lipsitz posit that resistance to unlivable destinies shapes the struggles by aggrieved communities that are determined to produce their own future. New practices, politics, and polities emerge from what Tomlinson and Lipsitz conceptualize as insubordinate spaces, which they define as "sites where people who lack material resources display great resourcefulness in deepening the capacity to free themselves and others from subordination, to imagine how things could be otherwise, and to move toward enacting that vision."[366] It is in insubordinate spaces where people struggle for self-determination and social justice, "envisioning and enacting new identities, identifications, affiliations, and alliances."[367] These insubordinate spaces can be found in abandoned and forgotten places like rural regions and urban landscapes afflicted by poverty and hyper-policing, unemployment, racism, housing insecurity, and political underrepresentation. Building on Tomlinson and Lipsitz, I apply an insubordinate spaces framework to the realm of sport. May 5th, 2018 was a historic night for professional boxing. Reis and Cecilia "First Lady" Brækhus became the first women to fight on the cable television network Home Box Office (HBO) in a live boxing match. Part of that history-making included Reis debuting her ring entrance for an international viewing audience. I examine Reis's ring entrance as an insubordinate space and argue that her deployment of expressive culture served as a disruption to neoliberal individualism, ideas of racial authenticity, gender politics in boxing, and Indigenous erasure.

[366] Barbara Tomlinson and George Lipsitz, *Insubordinate Spaces: Improvisation and Accompaniment for Social Justice,* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2019), 12.

[367] Tomlinson and Lipsitz, *Insubordinate Spaces,* 7.

Ring entrances have a long history as part of the pre-fight rituals in the sport of boxing. They are a theatrical source of entertainment used to set up the spectacle of the fight and have a strong presence in popular culture. Meaningful ring entrances have been used in well-known motion pictures, including the Academy Award-winning "Rocky" film series, Martin Scorsese's 1980 Academy Award-nominated "Raging Bull," and Ron Howard's 2005 film "Cinderella Man." In 2015, "Creed" was introduced as a sequel to the "Rocky" series. Starring Michael B. Jordan as "Adonis Creed," the boxing son of Rocky Balboa's opponent and friend, Apollo, the Creed movies shift the focus to a Black American fighter. Before the culminating fight in Creed 2, Adonis Creed is accompanied by his partner Bianca (Tessa Thompson) during his ring entrance, who sings the song "I Will Go to War."[368] Their fictional performance borrows directly from the real-life ring entrances of Black and Brown fighters, which often likewise include political, social, or emotionally poignant messages. Beyond being entertaining, ring entrances provide a performative space where fighters challenge society's dominant structures and ideologies. For example, before Jack Johnson was crowned the first Black heavyweight champion of the world in 1908, he was subjected to a racist verbal assault from fans who packed the Sydney, Australia boxing arena, yelling "nigger" and "coon" at him.[369] Two years later, Johnson defended his title against Jim Jeffries in Reno, Nevada. On this occasion, a live band played "All Coons Look Alike to Me" as Johnson walked to the ring.[370] These racist spectacles demonstrate the boxing crowd's

[368] "Tessa Thompson – I Will Go to War (From "Creed II" Soundtrack)," uploaded by SonySoundtracksVEVO, January 24, 2019, retrieved June 9, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lDDlf3yu8M0&list=LLDcxqayGFwrcHWubH28si3Q&index=1995.

[369] Chris Lamb, "Introduction," in *From Jack Johnson to LeBron James: Sports, Media, and The Color Line,* ed. Chris Lamb (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 1.

[370] William H. Wiggens, Jr., "Boxing's Sambo Twins: Racial Stereotypes in Jack Johnson and Joe Louis Newspaper Cartoons, 1908-1938," *Journal of Sport History,* 15, no. 3 (1988): 251-254, found in Kasia Boddy, *Boxing: A Cultural History,* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 287.

understanding of the politicized and racialized space a tension-filled ring entrance can create.[371] This politicized space also allows fighters to engage in important displays of agency during their ring entrances. Danny "Little Red" Lopez is a good example of this. Born on a Utah reservation in 1952, Lopez is a retired boxer of mixed Ute Indian, Mexican, and Irish heritage. In his 1980 rematch against world champion Mexican boxer Salvador Sanchez, Lopez entered the ring wearing a feathered headdress, representative of the Ute people and his experience of living with various aunts and uncles on the reservation.[372] Lopez regularly centered his Ute identity in his culturally expressive ring entrances.

For minoritized boxers, ring entrances regularly serve as ephemeral performative spaces where they can address social justice issues, disrupt structural and ideological power structures, and creatively reimagine a liberated alternative world.[373] A simple walk to the ring can become a complex sociopolitical display that tells a story about race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, or any other aspect of a boxer's lived experiences. In this chapter, I closely examine the May 5th, 2018 ring entrance of Kali "KO Mequinonoag" Reis. Her intentionally curated ring entrance expressed her cultural identity in ways that disrupted neoliberal individualism, dominant ideas of

[371] Thabiti Lewis and Justin D. García have used ring entrances as part of their analysis in examining "Iron" Mike Tyson and the matchup between Oscar De La Hoya and Fernando Vargas. Lewis examines the use of Hip Hop music in Tyson's ring entrance, arguing his ring entrance is both performance and an attempt to express a racial identity. In examining representations of cultural citizenship and gender, García applies a content analysis to De La Hoya and Vargas's ring entrances and the ways in which they each performed contrasting versions of manly Mexican-ness and American-ness. Thabiti Lewis, "Don't Believe the Hype: The Racial Representation of Mike Tyson in Three Acts," in *Fame to Infamy: Race, Sport, and the Fall from Grace,* ed. David C. Ogden and Joel Nathan Rosen (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2010). Justin D. García, "Boxing, Masculinity, and *Latinidad*: Oscar De La Hoya, Fernando Vargas, and *Raza* Representations," *The Journal of American Culture* 36, no. 4 (2013): 323-341.

[372] Anson Wainwright, "Best I Faced: Danny 'Little Red' Lopez," last modified February 11, 2019, https://www.ringtv.com/554332-best-i-faced-danny-little-red-lopez/.

[373] Rudy Mondragón, "Yo Soy José de Avenal: The Deployment of Expressive Culture in Disruptive Ring Entrances," in *Rings of Dissent: Boxing and Performances of Rebellion,* Eds. Rudy Mondragón, Gaye Theresa Johnson, and David J. Leonard, (Under Review).

racial authenticity, gender politics in boxing, and Indigenous erasure. My framing of Indigenous erasure incorporates Patrick Wolfe's work on settler colonization and what he terms the *logic of elimination*. Wolfe writes that settler colonization is predicated on the displacement of Indigenous peoples from their land, and that in its purest form, "the logic of elimination seeks to replace Indigenous society with that imported by the coloniser."[374] Indigenous erasure is a physical and ideological undertaking that displaces Indigenous society, encourages a destructive occupation of Indigenous territories, introduces reductive Euro-American conceptions of blood-quantum identification, and calls for the assimilation of Indigenous people into white American society in ways that disregard and destroy their native cultural mores.[375] Reis drew upon her lived experiences as a Native woman and collectivist sensibilities to create a ring entrance that challenged Indigenous erasure and racial authenticity. Hence, elaborating on her biography is important because her disruptive ring entrances are intimately connected to it.

In order to better understand the influences behind her ring entrance, I conducted an oral history with Reis. This oral *herstory* serves as both a methodological intervention and an archive for critical sports, ethnic, and cultural studies. The archiving of Reis's oral herstory is imperative given that women's contributions in boxing, especially their engagement in resistance politics, have been nonexistent in the body of critical sports, ethnic, and cultural studies literature. Scholars including Theresa Runstedtler, Louis Moore, T.J. Desch Obi, Dave Zirin, and José Alamillo have changed the discourses around boxing, particularly in analyzing how prizefighters engage in performative, symbolic, and material forms of resistance. Absent from this literature, however, is

[374] Patrick Wolfe, "Nation and MiscegeNation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology* no. 36 (1994): 93-152, 93.

[375] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387-409.

the excavation of stories about women boxers who have disrupted ideological and structural power. Also, because this oral herstory centers the voice of a woman prizefighter in the context of a predominantly male sport, it serves as an interruption to the traditional ways in which boxing has been analyzed. According to BoxRec, there are currently 25,914 active boxers across the world; 24,169 are male and only 1,745 are female.[376] These numbers not only show the imbalance in the structural representation of women in boxing, they also strongly suggest that the ring entrance space is almost exclusively a masculine one. They also foretell that almost all televised boxing matches are between two men, so viewing audiences rarely see the cultural interventions of women who walk to the ring during televised matches.

Kali Reis was born on August 24, 1986 in Providence, Rhode Island, and was raised in public housing between the cities of East Providence and Pawtucket. She describes herself as an "urban Native," which she defines as a contemporary Native who lives in the city and still tries to be true to their heritage and culture.[377] In 2010, the US census documented close to 80 percent of Natives living in urban centers.[378] Beyond the numbers, however, unpacking Reis's biography helps eliminate an essentialism that limits Natives to static ideas "like all things Indigenous operate on reserve/ations" or "that 'real' Natives live only on the rez."[379] Raised by a single mother, Reis is the youngest of five siblings– she has two older brothers and two older sisters – who she describes as "a bunch of mixed kids." Reis has maternal Native ancestry through the Seaconke

[376] "Boxing's Official Record Keeper," BoxRec, retrieved October 23, 2020, https://boxrec.com/en/ratings?r%5Brole%5D=proboxer&r%5Bsex%5D=F&r%5Bdivision%5D=&r%5Bcountry%5D=&r%5Bstance%5D=&r%5Bstatus%5D=a&r_go=&offset=1700.

[377] In Kyle Mays, *Hip Hop Beats*, *Indigenous Rhymes: Modernity and Hip Hop in Indigenous North America,* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2018), Afro-Indigenous Studies scholar Kyle Mays reminds us that majority of Native people in fact live in urban areas across the U.S.

[378] 2010 U.S. Census figures found in Mays, *Hip Hop Beats, Indigenous Rhymes.*

[379] Mays, *Hip Hop Beats, Indigenous Rhymes,* 136.

Wampanoag, Nipmuc, and Cherokee and African ancestry through her Cape Verdean father. Growing up, it was her mother who introduced her to Native culture. Reis was the "Black Indian" who found solace in attending powwows but also struggled with her multiracial identity in these spaces. She would encounter the worst racism from other Natives, driving her to try and prove her "Indianness." Regarding those struggles, she stated, "It would be the other Natives from other areas that I'd get racism [from] because I wasn't mixed with white or [because] I was mixed with Black."[380] This is not an uncommon reality. Claudio Saunt found that Creek Indians mixed with Black ancestry endured the heavier burden when compared to Creek Indians mixed with white ancestry.[381] Over the years, Reis has become intentional about embracing the complexities of her multiraciality. Her subjectivity of being a "Black Indian" and an urban Native matter because it disrupts rigid ideas of what an "authentic Native" is as well as decentering whiteness because Reis's multiraciality centers experiences of being multiple minoritized as Black and Native.[382] Lastly, her understanding of being a contemporary urban Native living in the present moment disrupts ideas that Indigenous peoples are static and fixed ideas of the past.

In addition to introducing Reis to Native culture, her mother is also credited with helping her daughter find the sport of boxing. Reis's mother introduced her to Domingo "Tall Dog" Monroe, a trainer from the Narragansett Tribe, who boxed professionally. It was later after having

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[380] Kali Reis, "Kali Reis: Professional Midweight Champion Boxer" conducted by Rudy Mondragón in 2019, Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2020.

[381] Claudio Saunt, *Black, White, Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) found in *Red and Yellow, Black and Brown: Decentering Whiteness in Mixed Race Studies,* eds. Joanne L. Rondilla, Rudy P. Guevarra Jr., and Paul Spickard (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2017).

[382] Paul Spickard, Rudy P. Guevarra Jr., and Joanne L. Rondilla, "Introduction: About Mixed Race, Not about Whiteness," in *Red and Yellow, Black and Brown: Decentering Whiteness in Mixed Race Studies,* eds. Joanne L. Rondilla, Rudy P. Guevarra Jr., and Paul Spickard (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2017), 1-20. According to Nicholas A. Jones and Jungmiwha Bullock, "The Two or More Races Population: 2010" (C2010BR-13; Washington, DC: US Census Bureau, September 2012), approximately 21% of mixed-race people reported being multiple minority.

moved on to train with Peter Manfredo, Sr. when she truly experienced chauvinism and hypermasculinity in the world of boxing. She took this as a challenge and given how she had developed trust issues from not always having her father around, the individual aspect of boxing intrigued her because it allowed her to both execute a game plan and freely express herself on her own terms. Like boxing, powwows also allowed Reis to express herself and explore her creative and artistic dimensions. At an early age, she began competing as a fancy dancer. What she loved most about it was the "high pace, on-your-toes, athletic-type style dance" that requires you to stay on rhythm with the drumbeat and allows the expression of your unique style to stand out.[383] Reis turned professional in 2008 and had a short amateur career given the limited competition in her region. In her first ten professional fights, Reis amassed a record of six wins, three losses, and one draw. It was on her eleventh fight where she got her second opportunity to fight for a world title. This fight became an early moment of public exposure in Reis's career as she chose to display to the world her Native culture and lived experiences through her fight attire and a ring entrance that paid tribute to powwows and fancy dancers.

Multidimensional Statement and Interventions in Winning Her First World Title

When it comes to the lead up of most sporting spectacles, audiences are generally not privy to what takes place. Only a few people knew that days prior to her November 21, 2014 fight against Teressa Perozzi, Reis's coach, Shawn Graham, had suffered a heart attack. Though she found him in stable condition, he was unfit for travel, forcing Reis to scramble and find a replacement. While most fighters leave it to their managers to take care of these types of issues, Reis took on this hidden form of labor in finding an alternate coach. Fortunately, Mike Veloz stepped in last-minute to work Reis's corner. However, on the morning of their scheduled departure, Veloz was unable

[383] Kali Reis, "Kali Reis: Professional Midweight Champion Boxer" conducted by Rudy Mondragón in 2019, Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2020.

to arrive at the airport on time, resulting in Reis and her entire team having to wait until the next day to fly to Southampton, Bermuda. This was challenging as Reis arrived in Bermuda on the day of the scheduled weigh-in and press conference, which can be a grueling experience as fighters push their bodies to the point of starvation and dehydration to come in at the contracted weight for a fight.

On the day of the press conference, boxing referee and representative of the International Boxing Association (IBA) Steve Smoger, served as the emcee. Smoger announced the parameters of this world title fight, highlighting the gendered differences in how boxing is regulated. Men may fight a maximum of twelve rounds, each lasting a mandatory three minutes. Women are limited to a ten-round maximum, and their rounds only last two minutes.[384] Reis found this unfair and inequitable stating, "if we fought just like the guys, we'd probably get a lot more respect, as far as time-wise."[385] Fighting "like the guys" to her means having the same rules and regulations applied to women's boxing. When restricted to two-minute rounds, fighters often feel rushed and a need to fight aggressively, regardless of their preferred strategy. Instead of having time to settle into the round by studying their opponent, assessing their offensive and defensive tactics, and executing a multifaceted game plan, women feel rushed and forced into more risk-taking, simply due to the fact that they have less time to score points than their male counterparts. In addition to the greater physical risk aggressive fighting poses, less time in the ring also means less exposure. Reis believes that if women are going to be denied equal pay for their time and labor however,

[384] In some cases, there have been women's fights that have been sanctioned to have 3-minute rounds. For the most part however, women's rounds last two-minutes.

[385] Kali Reis, "Kali Reis: Professional Midweight Champion Boxer" conducted by Rudy Mondragón in 2019, Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2020.

then fighting for an extra two rounds and minute per round is not justified given the potentially risks that remain unfairly compensated.

As the press conference continued, Smoger emphasized the importance of the title fight, describing the prestige of the world championship Reis and Perozzi were vying for. "This is a vacant title for the IBA Women's Middleweight championship of the world," Smoger announced. "It's a very, very prestigious belt. Fighters like Bernard Hopkins and Oscar De La Hoya, Felix Trinidad, on their way up, held this belt, so it is a very important belt."[386] Smoger's comparison, while a well-intentioned testament of the fight's importance, was also a reminder of how men's experiences are often centered in and used as the grounds for understanding women's experiences. Even the emphasis itself on this being a "women's" championship fight differed from the aforementioned male fighters, who were afforded the privilege of simply fighting for "the" championship. And finally, while Reis and Perozzi had their gender highlighted as "women boxers," Hopkins, De la Hoya, and Trinidad were never referred to as "men boxers." These artifacts of hegemonic and patriarchal discourses around gender are subtle but persistent, not only in boxing, but in broader society as well. Reis's response to it in this case was calculated and subtle. She first gave a calm and confident "thank you" to the island of Bermuda for hosting the fight, expressing her excitement to get into the ring and put on a good show. She praised Smoger as one of the best referees in boxing and reiterated his words about the prestige of the title, adding, "Fighting for this belt, like he said, really top-notch *male* fighters, fighters in general, have had this belt, so I'm just ready to fight, put on a good show for you guys, and have some fun in that ring."[387] Her emphasis on the word *male* was both a sincere acknowledgement of their importance,

[386] "Teresa Perozzi vs Kali Reis Weigh In, November 20, 2014," uploaded by bernewsdotcom, November 22, 2014, retrieved July 9, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmikhUBDoHs.

[387] Ibid.

as well as a surreptitious way to point out how pronouncements about a male fighter's gender sound awkward in comparison to our general acceptance of pronouncements about a female fighter's gender. This act of agency was an important step in challenging the different sets of rules, double standards, and wide gendered pay gaps in professional prizefighting.

As the challenger, Reis entered the ring first on fight night. She wore a purple and white bandana tied around her neck, along with a beaded medallion. Her trunks were also purple, with flying fringes hanging from the waistline, and her first name stitched in large capital letters on the front at her beltline. Her black top had fringed sleeves, matching the legs of her trunks, with the words "One Spirit" written across the back. The start of her ring entrance was gesticulated by the sounds of "War Cry," a song by Northern Cree, a powwow Round Dance drum and signing group from Maskwacis, Alberta, Canada. The sound of the music filling the Fairmont Southampton Resort arena prompted the ring announcer to inform the audience that, "obviously, Kali has a little bit of Native American Indian blood in her."[388] In this context, I apply a notion of spatial entitlement to demonstrate the summoning of new and imaginative uses of technology, creativity, and in this case, a ring entrance space that contains music and fashion that allows Reis to culturally express herself.[389] Reis's spatial entitlement and deployment of music and fashion is informed by her subjectivities as a two-spirit woman who is of mixed-race Seaconke Wampanoag, Nipmuc, Cherokee, and Cape Verdean ancestry. These choices also helped her create a discursive space of collectivity and belonging that invoked ancestral remembering. She reflected:

> The history behind even going to Bermuda was to me really, really a lot, a lot more deep than people thought because—until I kind of explained it. So being of Wampanoag descent and being from the Eastern Coast tribe, there was a lot of my ancestors and a lot of people

[388] "Boxing: Teresa Perozzi vs Kali Reis (Round 1)," uploaded by Channel 82 Bermuda, December 13, 2017, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VrN_92flfQ&t=237s.

[389] Gaye Theresa Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity: Music, Race, and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: UC Press, 2013).

> from this area that were taken from—the English from here, to Bermuda as slaves because that's—Bermuda has a lot of history with slaves… You can trace a lot of tribes and a lot of their ancestors from—you can find a lot of their ancestry in England as well as Bermuda. There's a lot of Native American people in Bermuda because of just that generation after generation being there from being enslaved.[390]

Linda Tuhiwai Smith annunciates a plethora of Indigenous research projects, one of which is remembering, defined as a recalling "of a painful past, re-membering in terms of connecting bodies with place and experience, and, importantly, people's responses to that pain."[391] Reis framed the significance of this fight within the painful and traumatic historical context of the enslavement and forced migrations of her ancestors. King Philip's War lasted from 1675 – 1678 and was fought in the pre-United States New England colonies. The war put Wampanoag Sachem leader King Philip, also known as Metacom, and his allies in opposition to English colonial settlers. The Natives' fear of being enslaved and subsequently sold played a major role in the war. New England colonial records report "large and small shipments of Indians being sent to Barbados, Bermuda, and Jamaica, or, more generically, 'out of the country.'"[392]

The fight itself did not last long. Reis dominated Perozzi, hurting her with a barrage of punches in the third round that prompted referee Steve Smoger to stop the contest. It was a cathartic moment for Reis as she acknowledged the crowd, embraced her team, and released emotional tears. She hugged her opponent, posed for pictures, and then made her way to the middle of the ring for the official announcement. Smoger lifted her hands in the air and wrapped the IBA belt around her waist as the ring announcer declared, "and the new, IBA (world) middleweight

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[390] Kali Reis, "Kali Reis: Professional Midweight Champion Boxer" conducted by Rudy Mondragón in 2019, Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2020.

[391] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples,* (New York: Zed Books, 2012), 147.

[392] Linford D. Fisher, "'Why shall wee have peace to bee made slaves': Indian Surrenderers During and After King Philip's War," *Ethnohistory* 64, no. 1 (2017): 91-114, 94.

champion!" In a post-fight interview with Channel 82 Bermuda, the interviewer described Reis as appearing comfortable in the ring despite not being on her home soil. He then asked her how she was able to stick to her strategy, knowing that the audience would be against her. Reis's responded:

> Well ironically this actually feels more like home than in the U.S. because I'm Native American. I represent the Seaconke Wampanoag Tribe back at home. And through history, they took our [ancestors] and brought em' here as slaves. And this is Native American Heritage Month and I just felt really at home because I'm here to take the souls of my ancestors' home. So, I felt that strength, so I really felt right at home here.[393]

Reis described the spiritual element of the fight and her engagement in the decolonial project of ancestral remembering. Traveling to Bermuda, Reis felt like she was "right at home" due to her Seaconke Wampanoag identity. She dedicated this fight, which also took place during Native Heritage Month, to her ancestors and honoring them by taking their souls back home. Specifically, Wampanoag who were enslaved and forcefully shipped to Bermuda as a result of the King Philip's War. Winning the title was an incredible accomplishment, but the larger victory was traveling to a place where she could engage in remembering. Smith defines this decolonial project as "remembering a painful past, re-membering in terms of connecting bodies with place and experience, and, importantly, people's responses to that pain."[394] Engaging in this decolonial project combined with winning her first world championship title became a process of cultural healing for Reis.

Reis's ring entrances have grown over the years. Since her fight with Perozzi, she has added layers describing them as

> a grand entry. So, at the beginning of a powwow, to open up ceremony of powwow, you'll have your warriors, your veterans, and you have the tribal flags. And there's usually no video taking. It's very sacred, you're opening up the circle, you're allowing your elders and everybody to open up that circle for you. And it's more or less a grand entry into

[393] "Boxing: Teresa Perozzi vs Kali Reis (Round 3)," uploaded by Channel 82 Bermuda, December 13, 2017, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tvO8-tmw_4.

[394] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 147.

> today's powwow, today's ceremony, today's celebration, today's whatever. So, basically my entrance is the same way. It's becoming a grand entry, because every time I fight at home, there's more and more dancers. But it's a grand entry into that battlefield, into that squared circle. So, it's opening up ceremony to make sure that I'm in the right state, and to be honored with people who are willing to be in the same state of mind and have the same intent to dance out into a grand entry. To open up that ceremony so I can do my thing, and fight for my people, and pray for my people. So, it's just to me the same thing, except we fight now.[395]

Reis's ring entrances parallel the cultural dynamics of powwows. It is a way for Reis to center her Indigenous subjectivity through the deployment of expressive culture, which disrupts anti-Indian racism that aims to disappear, vanish, and reduce Indigenous people and their cultures and histories.[396] By centering Indigeneity in her ring entrance, Reis resists the systematic efforts of dominant white supremacist culture that aims to exterminate and rewrite Indigenous people as they see fit. It was after her fight with Perozzi that Reis debuted a "Fight 4 All Nations" boxing motto. This motto functions as both a branding tool but more intentionally, as a philosophy that privileges the collective rather than the individual. Her ring entrances embrace this motto as she intends them to be spiritual and ceremonial so that she can fight and pray for all Indigenous communities.

A Disruptive Boxing Oral Herstory

The process of engaging in an oral herstory with Reis is itself a decolonizing methodology. It is a project of people's survival, preservation of cultures, and struggles of self-determination. This oral herstory was conducted in June 2019 in Reis's Pawtucket, Rhode Island home and focuses on her early life, introduction to boxing, struggles with being a mixed Indigenous person (Black Indian), and experiences in participating in an unregulated exploitative and neoliberal

[395] Kali Reis, "Kali Reis: Professional Midweight Champion Boxer" conducted by Rudy Mondragón in 2019, Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2020.

[396] C. Richard King, *Redskins: Insult and Brand* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2016).

capitalist sporting industry. As the researcher, it was important that the six hours we spent together privileged Reis's voice given that the experiences of multiracial women in boxing have been historically disregarded. Though I asked the questions, Reis asserted her agency in self-authoring the stories she wanted to share. Smith posits that "Indigenous communities have struggled since colonization to be able to exercise what is viewed as a fundamental right, that is to represent ourselves."[397] As researcher, it was imperative to honor her right to this.

Within a sports context, the issue of representational struggles and Indigenous rights can be observed in the politics of team nicknames. For example, from 1937-2019, the nickname and mascot for the National Football League (NFL) team for Washington, DC was the R*dskins.[398] R*dskin is an ethnic and racial slur, weaponized in ways that "injures and excludes" and denies the representational history and humanity of Indigenous peoples.[399] The ongoing defense of the name is the spoken and unspoken ways white supremacy "derives from and defends a series of entitlements or prerogatives anchoring a long history of owning Indians and Indianness in U.S. settler society."[400] Reis's story is an undertaking of self-representation that counters the dominant U.S. settler's image of Indigenous peoples. Additionally, her story serves as a deeper challenge to questions of what an authentic Indigenous person is. In sharing her testimony as a Black Indian, Reis pushes boundaries by complicating normative ideas of what an Indigenous person looks like and engages in the Indigenous project of *Celebrating Survival – Survivance*, which Smith defines as the degree in which Indigenous peoples retain their cultures, spiritual values, and authenticity

[397] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies,* 151.

[398] Also see the Cleveland Indians and Atlanta Braves from Major League Baseball as well as the Chicago Blackhawks of the National Hockey League and the Golden State Warriors of the National Basketball Association (1947 – 1969).

[399] King, *Redskins.*

[400] Ibid.

in resisting colonialism.[401] Sharing her story therefore is one way that Reis engages in resistance politics in the realm of sports.

Fight 4 All Nations: An Insubordinate Ring Entrance Space

Kali Reis versus Cecilia Brækhus

The May 5th, 2018 matchup with Cecilia "First Lady" Brækhus was the most important fight of Kali Reis's career. It was her 21st professional fight, and she had fought to a record of 13 wins, 6 losses, and 1 draw. This fight marked the first occasion that HBO, in its 45 years of televising live boxing matches, put on a match between two women. Reis was the underdog, the so-called "B-Side" of boxing, heading into this fight. B-Sides in boxing have less political and negotiating power. They get less compensation and are often overmatched and underprepared opponents whose spectacular defeats make champion or otherwise popular boxers look good. Brækhus was the A-Side in this fight. At the time, she held five world titles, had earned 32 straight victories, and was held in much higher regard than Reis by the boxing community. Reis embraced this challenge and saw this fight as an opportunity to show an audience, many of whom would be watching women box professionally for the first time, the excitement and quality of their boxing. Yet, leading up to the fight and given the A and B-Side politics of boxing, a great deal of attention was placed on Brækhus, leaving Reis as an afterthought with little to no mention. For example, four days prior to their fight, a Yahoo Sports headline read "Cecilia Brækhus putting belts on the line in HBO's first women's boxing match."[402] The focus was on Brækhus making history and there were only two mentions of Reis in the entire article. Reis strongly felt these representations

[401] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.

[402] Kevin Iole, "Cecilia Brækhus putting belts on the line in HBO's first women's boxing match," *Yahoo Sports,* May 1, 2018, https://sports.yahoo.com/cecilia-braekhus-putting-belts-line-hbos-first-womens-boxing-match-212028440.html.

were wrong because "it takes two to tango," meaning that a good fight depends on the two fighters who enter the ring together and the contrasting styles that each executes in the fight.[403] In this situation, it took two fighters to challenge the sexist barriers that exist in boxing and to be collectively recognized as the first women to be on an HBO live broadcast.

The background and context of Reis's fight with Brækhus underscore the politics and power dynamics that exist in boxing. Additionally, Reis's role as the underdog meant the boxing industry portrayed her as an overmatched contender whose primary job was to make the undisputed champion look good.[404] It was within this context that Reis created an insubordinate ring entrance space. American Indian Studies scholar Mishuana Goeman describes spatial discourses as (re)mapped by Native women and encourages people to move toward spatialities of belonging that do not bind, contain, or fix their relationship to land and each other in ways that limit their definitions of self and community."[405] In other words, Goeman's urges a reconceptualization and shift to spatialities that are boundless, fluid, and communal. Reis generates this kind of spatial discourse through her boxing motto of "Fight 4 All Nations," which is rooted in her Indigenous subjectivity that embraces the four directions – west, north, east, south – where all Native nations can be found, as well as fighting and praying with all Native communities.[406] In the following sections, I analyze Reis's entourage, music and sounds, and fashion and style

[403] Kali Reis, "Kali Reis: Professional Midweight Champion Boxer" conducted by Rudy Mondragón in 2019, Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2020.

[404] Ironically, the fight ended in a controversial unanimous decision victory for Brækhus even though Reis officially knocked her opponent down in the seventh round, almost knocked her down for a second time at the end of the eight round, and some experts felt that some of the closer rounds could have been scored in Reis's favor.

[405] Mishuana Goeman, *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping our Nations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

[406] Kali Reis, "Kali Reis: Professional Midweight Champion Boxer" conducted by Rudy Mondragón in 2019, Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2020.

politics, arguing that Reis's ring entrance is an insubordinate space that is filled with the deployment of expressive culture that disrupts neoliberal individualism, ideas of racial authenticity, gender politics in boxing, and Indigenous erasure.

Entourage

As discussed in the previous chapter, Kenneth Shropshire credits Hall of Fame fighter Sugar Ray Robinson with creating the boxing entourage in *Being Sugar Ray,* his biography on Robinson. Shropshire referred to a 1951 *Times* magazine article that evinced the magnitude and size of Robinson's group that traveled with him overseas to Paris, France. The article quotes trainer George Gainford, who said, "we just couldn't leave anybody, so we all came."[407] From that point on Robinson himself began to use the word "entourage" to describe his traveling party, which roots its contexts in an obligation and a responsibility to bring along friends and family who have themselves contributed and sacrificed towards the success of the athlete.[408] This is similar to what Tomlinson and Lipsitz describe as "accompaniment," which they argue is a disposition, sensibility and pattern of behavior that is devoted to creating connections with others while also identifying with them and helping them out.[409]

Since Robinson's initial designation, the sport of the boxing has embraced and normalized the entourage. Amateur and professional boxers from all cultural backgrounds now bring with them a group of intentionally selected people who help them in various aspects of their career and their personal lives. For Reis, the creation of her entourage is rooted in her commitment to Fight 4 All Nations, a strategy to reclaim a sporting space meant for entertainment and instead, transform

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[407] "Sugar in Paris," *Time,* January 1, 1951, 36, found in Kenneth Shropshire, *Being Sugar Ray: The Life of Sugar Ray Robinson, America's Greatest Boxer and The First Celebrity Athlete* (New York: BasicCivitas, 2007), 155.

[408] Kenneth Shropshire, *Being Sugar Ray: The Life of Sugar Ray Robinson, America's Greatest Boxer and The First Celebrity Athlete* (New York: BasicCivitas, 2007).

[409] Tomlinson and Lipsitz, *Insubordinate Spaces*, 23.

it with cultural productions that represent new ways of being a Black Indian woman who makes her Indigeneity central.

The creation of Reis's entourage is an example of accompaniment that functions as a direct one-two punch combination to a neoliberal state that privileges the individual, private property, and creation of wealth.[410] In organizing her entourage for this fight, Reis asked members of the local and regional Indigenous nations and tribes to bless her by walking to the ring with her. This idea came from Indigenous practices she learned as a youth, in which visitors give thanks to the people who are indigenous to the land. A week prior to her fight, Reis used her social media platforms of Facebook and Instagram to gather her entourage and curate an insubordinate ring entrance space. In an Instagram post, dated April 29, 2018, Reis shared a photo of a Facebook status that stated: "WHERES (sic) ALL MY CALIFORNIA NATIVES AT???!! (SO Cal, Carson) I'm working on getting approved to have a few dancers join me in my walk out entrance next Saturday!! IF we get the go ahead it would be an honor to have a few drummers as well as a dancer or two to help…"[411] This social media clarion call was part of the spiritual undertaking for Reis, as she placed her faith in the creator to send her the right people to accompany her to the ring. Although Reis's request was not answered by Gabrielino/Tongva peoples, who are native to the Southern California region, she did receive responses from Southern California (SO Cal) dancers with Indigenous roots. Two of them came from the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation, and the third from the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe. These dancers joined her entourage and ring entrance. Though the dancers lived locally, the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation is also known as the

[410] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[411] ko_ndnbxr (Kali Reis), "Hopefully we get it approved! Trying to rep hard and spread some good medicine and prayers LIVE ON HBO!!" *Instagram,* April 29, 2018, retrieved November 1, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/BiKVGE5F86W/?igshid=1jtmzwwwgryoc.

Three Affiliated Tribes and is located on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in central North Dakota, and the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe has geographical roots in present day Massachusetts and Reis's home region of Eastern Rhode Island.

Reis's ring entrance lasted close to two minutes and was led by the three Indigenous dancers. Through their presence alone, Reis's entrance made clear statements about Natives being alive in the contemporary moment, challenging hegemonic notions and efforts of erasure and reducing Indigenous people as antiquated and invisible. It is in alignment with Kyle Mays' work on the meanings of being Indigenous today as he argues that "Indigenous hip hop provides for us an opportunity to reimagine how we understand the complexities of Indigenous identity production; how we can challenge colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy; and how hip hop provides a space where Native people, especially youth, can be modern and construct identities not tied to colonialism."[412] Similar to his argument on hip hop, it is the boxing ring entrance that provides this opportunity of reimagination and representation for Reis. Led by Indigenous peoples, her entrance made Indigenous subjectivities and her Fight 4 All Nations philosophy the salient features. Reis understands that people may have watched her ring entrance without fully understanding all its cultural nuance and the oppressive systems it challenged. But when they see how serious she is about it, Reis states, she knows that people begin to realize it is not a "circus" or "novelty." Instead, they learn that every aspect of her ring entrance is rooted "back from generations of fight, of warriors" that have survived. Reis adds, "we're still here," reminding viewers of the functional essence of her ring entrance; the message out to the world that

[412] Mays, *Hip Hop Beats, Indigenous Rhymes,* 129. Ring entrances have a rich history of incorporating elements of hip hop culture and sensibilities. These include the use of fashion and live performances of rap music. See Thabiti Lewis, "Don't Believe the Hype: The Racial Representation of Mike Tyson in Three Acts," in *Fame to Infamy: Race, Sport, and the Fall from Grace,* ed. David C. Ogden and Joel Nathan Rosen (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2010).

Indigenous people and their cultures exist, persist, and continue to resist white supremacist projects of Native cultural erasure and elimination.

Music and Sound

Insubordinate spaces are social, collaborative and collective as well as sites where people think in terms of "we" rather than "me."[413] When it comes to Reis's ring entrance, this social, collaborative, and collective sense is central to how she selects her music. For fighters, music selection is important and often decided by the boxer with the purpose of being relatable to their fans, for entertainment, and self-motivation. In previous fights, Reis has trusted the drummers who walk her out to the ring to choose the song they want to perform. On nights when she did not have drummers in her entourage, Reis would instead have the song "War Cry" by Northern Cree played on the arena speakers as she walked to the ring. The night of her fight against Brækhus, it was this song that played during her ring entrance. The dancers led the way as Reis walked behind them, shaking her legs to loosen up and stretch them. She wore a purple bandana over her mouth, which she pulled down to let out a war cry in unison with her entrance music early into her walk. The Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe member at the front of the entourage responded with a war cry of his own. The sonic space Reis creates with this song and accompanying sounds function as a framing device that speaks to Reis's disruption of racial authenticity, gender politics, and Indigenous erasure.

As a Black Indian, Reis draws from the expressive cultural practices of two different sociocultural locations. When it comes to music and the deployment of what Shana Redmond calls "anthems," Reis utilizes music as a method rooted in the African diaspora.[414] Redmond argues that

[413] Tomlinson and Lipsitz, *Insubordinate Spaces.*

[414] Shana Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora,* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

music is more than just sound but also a complex system of meaning-making that mediates relationships to others, to space, and to collective history and historical moments.[415] Within the African diaspora, "music functions as a method of rebellion, revolution, and future visions that disrupt and challenge manufactured differences used to dismiss, detain, and destroy communities."[416] What is unique about Reis is that her song selection is not directly linked to the African diaspora. Her connection to the African diaspora is her Cape Verdean ancestry that allows her to authentically draw on music as a method of rebellion, using Northern Cree's "War Cry," a powwow and Round Dance drum sound, to stage her disruption. This intervention consists of a cultural production and nuanced performance about the possibilities of what a racially mixed, Black Indian person can be as well as making salient the humanity of Indigenous peoples. As a fighter who has struggled with issues of racial authenticity, Reis's embracement of both her Native and Black subjectivities come together in this moment of her ring entrance as she deploys an Indigenous sound via an African diasporic musical method that speaks to a disruption to dominant norms of racial and cultural authenticity and Indigenous erasure.

Reis's deployment of music has deeply rooted and multifaceted connections to her Black and Indigenous identities. Her choice of music reflects the complexity of navigating those two identities, in particular:

> I'd say within the last maybe eight years, I've definitely embraced the fact that having both—I found my footing in the same time as I found my footing with boxing being more than just hitting people in the face. It's more—a bigger purpose. So, when I found out that there were other people like me, other mixed Natives with First Nations in Canada that were Black and First Nations, they were dealing with the same thing. And by me talking about it a little bit more and being proud of it, how people were opening up a little bit more to me, that actually helped me embrace it a lot more and, well, okay, I can talk about it,

[415] Redmond, *Anthem*.

[416] Ibid., 1.

> and people are impacted about it, and they're opening up about it, and they're embracing it and loving their self.[417]

For Reis's process of becoming, it was empowering to connect with other First Nation peoples in Canada who had similar Black and Native identity experiences. In *Racially Mixed People in America,* Maria Root states one of the breakthroughs of the civil rights era was empowerment for racially minoritized groups to self-name. This process, relatively speaking, is in the beginning stages for multiracial people. And "in essence," Root argues, "to name oneself is to validate one's existence and declare visibility."[418] Root's argument is important in understanding Reis's use of Northern Cree's "War Cry" and how its music provides her with an alternative mechanism to "talk about it," while engaging others who share similar racialized experiences. Ideally, the discourse moves them to engage in their own self-naming processes and practices. It is these kinds of actions that have the potential to disrupt oppressive and rigid structures of racial classification that deny people an alternative space of racial possibilities.

Lastly, Reis described how the unscripted and improvised performance of war cries during her ring entrance challenge gender norms. These loud, warrior-based exclamations have been considered distinctly masculine, having been primarily performed by Indigenous men. At the same time, Reis noted the common knowledge among East Coast tribes is that many of them have historically had women leaders, chiefs, and Sachems. Women like herself have felt comfortable letting out war cries instead of trilling. Reis shared that "most of the time, the women do the trilling and the men do the war cry. It's not really assigned to anybody, but you'll hear women trill more

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[417] Kali Reis, "Kali Reis: Professional Midweight Champion Boxer" conducted by Rudy Mondragón in 2019, Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2020.

[418] Maria P. P. Root, "Within, Between, and Beyond Race," in *Racially Mixed People in America,* ed. Maria P. P. Root (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992), 7, found in *Red and Yellow, Black and Brown,* eds. Joanne L. Rondilla, Rudy P. Guevarra Jr., and Paul Spickard.

or less."[419] Though the gender designation between war cries and trilling is not formally established, Reis demonstrates that there is a general cultural understanding of the genders that engage in each. This ephemeral performance by Reis and her use of music and war cries highlights how she rebels against limiting ideas of racial authenticity and gender norms. Her ring entrance is colorful, loud, and spectacular, which she jokingly acknowledges, stating, "I know I scare people, and I don't care." On the night of her fight with Brækhus, her two-minute ring entrance was an attention grabbing, showstopper that used hypervisibility to give a voice to Native experiences. When speaking about Native Americans in the context of team mascots and as being more than stereotypes, Lakota writer and reporter Simon Moya-Smith argues that Native people give visibility to who they are, the issues they are trying to solve, and in that process, "this visibility allows for a rehumanization."[420] Reis's ring entrance uses hypervisibility to rehumanize as well as assert that Indigenous peoples and cultures are living and fighting in the present moment.

Fashion and Style Politics

In "The Pugilistic Point of View," sociologist Loïc Wacquant argued that "boxing is the vehicle for a project of *ontological transcendence* whereby those who embrace it seek literally to fashion themselves into a new being."[421] Beyond merely fashioning oneself into a new being however, the ring entrances space is where fighters can radically express new social identities and cultural productions. Reis does this through a performative deployment of fashion and style. To analyze Reis's fashion and style politics, I use Catherine S. Ramírez's conceptualization of style politics and Luis Alvarez's exploration on the meanings of the zoot suit as a lens to examine the

[419] Kali Reis, "Kali Reis: Professional Midweight Champion Boxer" conducted by Rudy Mondragón in 2019, Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2020.

[420] Simon Moya-Smith, "Reclaiming the Native Voice," *CNN,* June 18, 2014, found in King, *Redskins.*

[421] Loïc J.D. Wacquant, "The Pugilistic Point of View: How Boxers Think and Feel about Their Trade," in *Theory and Society,* 24 no. 4 (1995): 489-535, 501.

political meaning of boxing attire. Ramírez's work scrutinizes the zoot suit as a spectacle of wartime style. Style here refers to a signifying practice of displaying the zoot subculture's codes through clothing, hair, and cosmetics while *style politics* refers to an expression of difference via one's stylistic choices.[422] Alvarez coined the term *body politics of dignity* to argue that bodies are used to resist and confront the denial of one's dignity due to their bodies being discursively constructed as a dangerous criminal.[423] These understandings of style politics provide the framework through which I analyze her stylistic choices and the cultural productions displayed in Reis's ring entrance.

Boxers wear hats, robes, and trunks that are all part of what Kali referred to as "boxing regalia." For her ring entrance, Reis wore her hair in a double braid. The braids were tied together in the back so they would not affect her vision during the fight. The double braid rested on her back and as she walked out to the ring, Reis had a black, purple, and white beaded hat that adorned her logo, two feathers in the upright position with the letters "KO" written at the base. This same logo adorned the back of her robe, which was sleeveless and mostly white. Her purple logo matched the trim of the robe's hood. Reis trusted the design of her boxing robe and trunks to Harlem, New York's Angel Alejandro, of Double A Boxing. Their process of making outfits is a collective one, with Reis explaining her vision to Alejandro, who then brings her ideas to fruition. Alejandro takes the time to research powwows and fancy dancers online on to make sure he accurately executes Reis's requests. The outfit she wore on this night cost between $600-800 USD.

[422] Catherine Sue Ramírez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

[423] Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance During World War II* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008).

Aside from being Reis's favorite color, purple is also the color of wampum, which are small cylindrical beads made from quahog shells that are native to the Northeast region. The colors purple and white represent royalty, as well. According to Reis, the more purple you have in the quahog shell, the more valuable it is. As a cherished item, Reis takes that understanding of wampum and intentionally adds purple to her outfit as well as her boxing gloves so that it "scream(s) regal. I come from royalty, a line of royalty, royal people." The colors and feathers have intentional meaning for Reis. The two feathers used in her logo represent her two-spirit subjectivity, which embraces both her feminine and masculine ways of being. Brian Joseph Gilley states that at the fundamental level, two-spirit identities are disruptive because they center "one's felt gender rather than one's socially prescribed one" or anatomical sex associations amongst Native American communities within their traditional cultural contexts.[424] As a disruption to heteropatriarchy and colonial gender binary, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson argues that an imposed artificial gender binary is a mechanism for controlling Indigenous bodies and identities by laying out "two sets of rigidly defined roles based on colonial concepts of maleness and masculinity as more important than female and femininity and erases any variance."[425] Reis's performance of this modern-day pan-Indian subjectivity is flexible and not rigid as it is used both to describe nonbinary genders and sexuality in Native communities. Reis understands her two-spiritedness as a blessing as well as a nuanced and complex identity that is unique to the individual.

[424] Brian Joseph Gilley, "Two-Spirit Powwows and the Search for Social Acceptance in Indian Country," in *Powwow: Origins, Significance, and Meaning,* ed. Eric Lassiter (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

[425] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 123. Simpson uses two-spirit and queer as an umbrella term in this text to refer to all Indigenous two-spirit, gay, bisexual, pansexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, and gender nonconforming people.

The final component of her boxing regalia are her customized trunks, containing the essence of Reis's lived experience as competitive fancy dancer. Boxers traditionally wear trunks styled like shorts. Reis has elected to go in a different stylistic direction. Her trunks from her May 5th, 2018 fight resembled a breechcloth or loincloth. The front part was pentagonal, cut in a way that highlights Reis' legs, which she states are the source of her strength. Her trunks were also white and purple, with "Reis" stitched into the front beltline. Purple sequins adorned the middle of the pentagonal shapes that hung down from the middle of her waist in the front and backsides. On the side of her trunks are purple and white fringes which hold special meaning. Reis described them, saying, the "whole meaning behind the fringes is to kind of pay homage to my fancy dancing days. I don't dance in the circle anymore, as far as fancy dance. But I dance in that ring."[426] Paying homage to her fancy dancing days speaks to a larger gendered intervention. According to Tara Browner, women's fancy dance style is a direct outgrowth of male dancing. Based on powwow traditions of the early 1940s, several teenage girls grew frustrated that men were the only ones allowed to fancy dance. These girls and women subverted this practice, dressing in men's outfits and dancing at a South Dakota powwow. These types of actions and forms of dissent, Browner argues, have led to women developing a fancy dance for women.[427] According to an interview with Sherenté Mishitashin Harris (Narragansett), the original women who took these risks to fancy dance "faced backlash and criticism for breaking traditions within the circle and the set expectations about what women should do."[428] Reis builds on this legacy of Indigenous rebellion

[426] Kali Reis, "Kali Reis: Professional Midweight Champion Boxer" conducted by Rudy Mondragón in 2019, Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2020.

[427] Tara Browner, *Heartbeat of the People: Music and Dance of the Northern Pow-wow,* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

[428] Jennifer Levin, "Footloose: The fancy dancing of Sherenté Harris," *United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc.,* August 10, 2018, https://www.usetinc.org/news/footloose-the-fancy-dancing-of-sherente-harris-8-13-2018/.

by paying homage to her fancy dance days with the selection of colors, symbols, and fringes found in her outfit. Kelley, states that "while the zoot suit was not meant as a direct political statement, the social context in which it was worn rendered it so."[429] Some of the fans in attendance as well as those who watched from homes across the globe understood the cultural meanings behind the symbols, colors, and signs in her boxing regalia. Yet, for others, the message was not entirely understood. This does not, however, reduce its impact. Her actions took place in relation to the social context of the night in which her regalia was worn; one where anti-Indian racism, white supremacy, white privilege, and Indigenous erasure continues to dehumanize Indigenous communities. Even without the deployment of the entourage that accompanied her, the music and sounds, and fashion and style choices, her mere presence as a Black Indian is disruptive. Jeff Corntasel (Cherokee) and Taiaiake Alfred (Kahnawake Mohawk) remind us that Indigeneity itself is a place-based form of insubordination due to an oppositional identity and existence that has constantly struggled against imperialism and colonization by foreign entities.[430]

Insubordinate Ring Entrance Space: Limitations and the "Bigger Picture"

Though I have argued that ring entrances are insubordinate spaces of possibility, it is important to consider its limitations. Tomlinson and Lipsitz critically remind us that insubordinate spaces are not liberated or free spaces as "they are not utopian places that offer a blueprint for a perfect world."[431] There is an agency in Reis's curation and design of an insubordinate ring entrance space that envisions and enacts new cultural productions, ways of being, affiliations, and

[429] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 166.

[430] Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, "Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism," in *Government and Opposition 40* no. 4 (2005): 597-614, found in Tomlinson and Lipsitz, *Insubordinate Spaces*. Tomlinson and Lipsitz quoted Alfred and Corntassel from Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

[431] Tomlinson and Lipsitz, *Insubordinate Spaces*, 12.

alliances. Beyond her control, however, is how media and fans interpret her interventions. No matter how much agency is involved and how "authentic" Reis's performance is, colonial and settler gazes in colonist settler spaces do not disappear. The contradiction in Reis's powerful, ephemeral ring entrance performance is found in its reception. The non-Native fans and media figures who enjoyed Reis's ring entrance performance also live in a world that is mediated by racist and sexist stereotypes of Indigenous people. In other words, it is necessary to acknowledge that the presence of a settler colonial gaze is ever so present because, as Wolfe reminds us, settler colonization and the logics of elimination are structural rather than an event.[432]

Reis's ring entrance is nonetheless an insubordinate space that is filled with the deployment of expressive culture that serves as a disruption to neoliberal individualism, ideas of racial authenticity, gender politics in boxing, and Indigenous erasure. Rather than conform to neoliberal performances of multiculturalism that are more palatable to global audiences, Reis enters the ring in holistic fashion by centering her Black Indian, two-spirit, and Fight 4 All Nations philosophy. Furthermore, her ring entrance serves as an important archive (preserved as media on YouTube) because it challenges scholars to think about critical sport, ethnic, and cultural studies in new ways, all within a sporting space that has long remained underexamined. Reis also enacts new collective social relations with aggrieved communities that take place in person and discursively through her ring entrance. The hyper-visible elements in her ring entrance make her relatable and accessible to Native people who understand what she is doing and why. Being a Black Indian - whether when interacting with Natives at powwows or with the media and fans in boxing spaces – forces people to rethink internalized ideas about how Indigenous people look.

[432] Wolfe, "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native."

There is so much left to be analyzed and examined from Reis's oral herstory. When it comes to neoliberal individualism and exploitation in boxing, Reis's herstory opens a portal to witness and examine the complexities of collective ways of being while navigating a hyper-capitalist and abusive sport. After weigh-in the day before their match, Reis and her team were involved in a dispute with Cecilia Brækhus and her team over the agreed upon weight of the gloves they would use. Brækhus claimed her contract stated they would fight in 10-ounce gloves, while Reis claimed it was 8-ounces. According to the California State Athletic Commission's (CSAC) Laws and Regulations Article 7. Ring and Equipment - § 322 Gloves-Weight states that "contestants in all weights up to and including the welterweight class shall wear no less than eight-ounce gloves."[433] This policy is consistent with what Reis was arguing, which was to fight in 8-ounce gloves due to the stipulations of her contract and the CSAC. In boxing, the weight of a boxing glove matters. Had Reis fought in 8-ounce gloves, her hands would have been faster, and a lighter glove also means a power puncher like her would have a significant advantage over a smaller opponent. Reis knew that Brækhus was the champion and A-Side fighter though, meaning that it would be nearly impossible to get her to acquiesce fighting in 8-ounce gloves. Physically drained and starved after making the 147-pound limit, Reis was left with the choice to walk away or to take the fight on her opponent's new terms.

> So, I said okay. We came to an agreement. It was either get on a plane and go home, and just sue the shit out of everybody, and not have this historical event, and not make women's boxing better after this, not open up doors, not break down barriers, not be part of history. Or fight, and say, "You know what? Okay. We'll do what you want, princess, and I'll take the 10-ounces." And I said, "Okay. You know what? There's a bigger picture here."[434]

[433] Laws & Regulations: Guidelines and Policies for Officials, *California State Athletic Commission*, last modified September 2018, https://www.dca.ca.gov/csac/stats_regs/lawreg_manual.pdf.

[434] Kali Reis, "Kali Reis: Professional Midweight Champion Boxer" conducted by Rudy Mondragón in 2019, Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2020.

Rather than take her council's advice of suing the CSAC and HBO network, Reis opted instead to fight on. She ultimately decided that this was an unmissable opportunity for the sport of women's boxing. Despite the violation of her contract and last-minute changes (which can also be read as Brækhus and her team trying to engage in psychological warfare to gain an advantage over her), Reis made the sacrifice of fighting in 10-ounce gloves for the "bigger picture." Beyond fighting her opponents in the ring, she also fights for all Nations and Indigenous communities and women's boxing. These interventions, amongst others, are all hidden forms of gendered labor that are detailed in Reis's oral herstory and manifested for all to witness in her multifaceted ring entrance.

Conclusion

In *Miles Before the Bell,* I have advocated for the importance of studying boxing critically to excavate and unveil narratives and stories about resistance, dissent, protest, and radical self-expression in the sport of boxing. Building on the critical paradigm of sport, I situated the boxing ring entrance as a complex performative space that requires a deeper examination. I defined ring entrances as "ephemeral spaces of possibilities, where fighters are able to use their imagination, creativity, expressive culture, and histories to curate performances of liberation and dissent."[435] This conceptualization and examination of boxing led me to argue that boxers – particularly Latinx, immigrant, and Black boxers – are most often the unit of sale, a commodity, and ultimately pawns in a highly commodified, transactional, and unregulated sporting industry. Though I have situated boxers as pawns who participate in an exploitative sporting context, they nonetheless utilize and transform the ring entrance to enact their agency and negotiate the structural forces found in the boxing industry through their performance and claims of sporting entitlements. I defined sporting entitlements as the ways in which professional boxers fluidly and subtly perform their multiple identities and subjectivities as well as politics, dissent, disruption, and resistance against dominant ideologies and structures of power through the deployment of expressive culture. When fighters perform and make claims to sporting entitlements, they are engaged in a process of constructing cultural productions that center their personal lived experiences, multiple subjectivities, and at times both disrupt and reinforce hegemonic forces of race, gender, class, sexuality, and immigration. I have also argued that boxers at times need to perform resistance in subtle, covert, and disguised ways to remain undetected to not risk securing the possibilities of

[435] Rudy Mondragón, "Yo Soy José de Avenal: The Deployment of Expressive Culture in Disruptive Ring Entrances," in *Rings of Dissent: Boxing and Performances of Rebellion,* Eds. Rudy Mondragón, Gaye Theresa Johnson, and David J. Leonard, (Under Review).

scheduling future fights and potential financial earnings. This dimension of boxing is important because fighters participate in a sporting industry that does not provide them with long term contracts, minimum salary, pension plan, or health care. Given this exploitative dynamic, fighters participate in a precarious market and labor force that has the power to dispose of them the moment fighters no longer serve them a utility.

Future Directions

I have posited that most boxers exist in a constant state of economic and representational vulnerability, subjected to the whims of a shifting market, as well as to the effects of neoliberal multiculturalism and dominant ideologies of race, gender, sexuality, and poverty. It is the ring entrance that can function as one of the very few opportunities for self-representation and community agency. This takes places within a context of hyper-capitalism that the sport exemplifies. To strengthen my argument, I will begin to examine more closely the ways in which boxers participate in this sport industry as laborers and exploited workers who depend on relevancy. I will begin to ask where does labor studies fit into the conceptualization of the economies of relevance in boxing? I conceptualize the Relevance Economies of Boxing as an issue that deals with the politics of winning. In boxing, merit can only take a boxer so far. It is how they win and the narratives that get attached to the fighters that make them marketable and profitable. There is no guarantee that a boxer will generate millions of dollars through their work. There is a small percentage of boxers who achieve that feat. This commonsense idea in boxing is what fuels the romantic stories that one punch can change the fate of a fighter: for good or for bad. This is the narrative that informs the famous Rocky film series, where a white working-class fighter lands the fight of his life and defeats the great Apollo Creed. The reality is, however, that there is a hierarchy

in boxing that operates in a way to control the industry by establishing value labels and categories for human commodities.

The value categories in boxing are related to the ways in which boxing narratives are informed by neoliberal multicultural categories of race, gender, class, sexuality, and immigration status. These categories are manipulated in a way to create a dramatic storyline intended to capture the attention of boxing fans who will purchase tickets and subscribe to television services to watch fights. The 2002 fight between Oscar De La Hoya and Fernando Vargas is a good example here. Their fight was promoted as "Bad Blood" due to their conflicting versions of ethnic identities and manhood. Both U.S. born Mexicans, Vargas and De La Hoya's promotional tour consisted of discursive battles of who was the more manly Mexican working-class version between the two. These are theatrical scripts that, in this example, relies on racial and ethnic scripts to build the theatrical narratives and conflict of the fight. A closer examination of the value categories can tell us how boxing administrators and fans make sense of the value a human body has in relation to the labor they perform in the ring. For example, the most used categories - by boxing promoters and fans – are "Cash Cow" and "Fan Friendly." Cash Cow is a term that signifies a fighter that has a financial upside and positive return on investment. In other words, they are the type of fighter whose labor inside and out of the ring can yield high financial dividends. In this current era of boxing, some of the "Cash Cows" are Oscar De La Hoya, Floyd Mayweather Jr., and Saul Alvarez. A "Fan Friendly" fighter is different than a "Cash Cow" in the sense that their style is the focus of their value category. If a fighter is dubbed "Fan Friendly," it means their fighting style inside the ring is one of high offensive output. They are often described as a being a fighter that is willing to take a punch or two to land one of their own. Fans love this style due to the risks the fighter takes to showcase an offensive rather than defensive display of fighting. This style is also racialized and

ethnicized. The idea of "Mexican Style" is one described as a Mexican or non-Mexican fighter who fights in a kill or be killed manner. They are fan friendly because the fighter is understood as taking risks and exposing themselves to harm to find a way to win a fight. "Cash Cow" and "Fan Friendly" are only two of many other value categories that I have identified that inform the value a fighter has. Even the "Cash Cow," who is a valuable human commodity to the boxing industry, has to carefully navigate the terrain of boxing when making political statements because saying the wrong thing can put them at high risk of losing financial sponsors, fanbases, and future fights. Additional categories that I will exam include Great White Hopes, Gentlemen, Gatekeepers, Journeymen, Durable, Cab Drivers, and Tomato Cans.

With these value categories in mind, I am concerned with how boxers accumulate value on their terms. In accumulating value, what does it allow boxers to do and get away with? I understand that this value is precarious and not fixed. A fighter's value can plumate from one fight to the next for a variety of reasons that range from health issues to a fighter's age. In a sporting market where there are over 20,000 active fighters, how does a boxer stand out and become relevant? A fighter is relevant if they are, for example, "Fan Friendly." They don't need to be undefeated or regarded as a top championship contender. The role they serve in the sport is making an up-and-coming young fighter or a current champion look good to elevate said champion or young contender and increase their social capital and value within the economy of relevance in boxing. An example of this is Gabe Rosado, who I will interview for the next phase of this project. Rosado is a fighter who does not have a glamours record (current record: 26 Wins – 13 Loses – 1 Draw) yet has managed to fight in world title bouts as well as appear in the film, *Creed.* My goal is to explore how Rosado navigates the boxing industry and despite not being a consistent "winner" in the sport, has managed to make himself as one of the most talked about fighters in boxing. He is a fighter

that many will call "Fan Friendly," mostly attributed to his bloody defeat against Gennady Golovkin in 2013. Going up in weight classes, Rosado faced one of the most feared boxers at that moment. Although the fight was stopped in the 7th round, Rosado earned a symbolic victory due to the spirited way he fought and never quit. This way of fighting earned him value and relevance in boxing. If relevance provides fighters with some type of capital in boxing, what does relevance provide fighters who desire to make political statements? At the root of my exploration of relevance economies is the ways in which fighters use their value to take risks in using their platforms, in this case their ring entrances, to disrupt and interrupt dominant structures of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, and nation.

I am most concerned with collecting and archiving data that speaks to the relevance economies leveraged by fighters who make political statements in boxing. This is what I call the *rebellious boxing archive,* which is the retrieval and identification of data and evidence that demonstrates disruptive moments in boxing. This data comes in the form of social media, YouTube videos, Twitter posts, material culture, and in-depth interviews and oral histories with boxers and supporting members. These protagonists can elucidate the significance of the boxing ring entrances, as well as other disruptive spaces in boxing. The *rebellious boxing archive* is a methodological intervention that builds on the work of Kelly Lytle Hernández's "rebel archive," defined as the writings, songs, and other accounts produced by survivors of various crusades to eliminate racial outsiders that speak to the words and actions of dissidents in Los Angeles.[436] Building the *rebellious boxing archive* will create a new and never before collected record of boxers who have made their mark as dissenters and resistors of power in different epochs and historical moments. It will enrich and expand the current status of boxing archives that focus on

[436] Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

sport and resistance, particularly the heavy emphasis on political protest and boxing embodied by Muhammad Ali. This is not to say that it is unimportant to examine Ali. On the contrary, it is to say that the *rebellious boxing archive* has the potential to show scholars that Muhammad Ali has built on previous boxing dissenters and that contemporary fighters protest and resist in the spirit of Ali. In collecting interviews with non-boxers, this archives also creates a record centered on the collective aspects of not only the sport but also in how other people assist boxers in making political and cultural expressions.

In conclusion, this research has alerted me to the ways in which Black and Brown fighters creatively use their immediate resources to generate new ways of understanding liberation, dissent, and resistance in sport. It has also demonstrated how important it is in the present moment to give more attention to this understudied sport within the realm of Ethnic Studies. The topic can no longer be marginalized and undervalued because the discourses and narratives found in the sport are ripe for qualitative analysis and inquiry. In June 2019, Andy "The Destroyer" Ruiz Jr. beat Anthony Joshua inside the Madison Square Garden in New York to capture three heavyweight world titles. Prior to the start of the fight, Ruiz was treated as a mere steppingstone for Joshua, who was fighting in the U.S. for the first time in his star-studded career. Ruiz entered the ring to Nipsey Hussle's "Grindin All my Life," a song that allowed Ruiz to frame his personal working-class story and boxing career as one full of sacrifice with the ultimate desire to reach the top of the heavyweight division. As the fight started, the commentators immediately commented on Ruiz's body due to his physical frame not coinciding with white European standards of beauty and health. In the eyes of promoters, media, and fans, the plan was for Ruiz to lose so that Joshua would look stellar to a U.S. and global boxing market. Ruiz shocked the world when he knocked down and eventually stopped Joshua in the 7th round. This story is a romantic one. It is also a story about

resistance to racism and fatphobia[437] and speaks to the ways in which fighters are assigned categories of values and function as commodities to the boxing industry. In this case, Ruiz was a "Fan Friendly" fighter with a well-known name that was perceived as not being to big of a risk for Joshua, who entered the fight as a "Cash Cow." In winning this fight, Ruiz not only captured three world titles, but also disrupted the plans of the promoters and boxing industry as well as popular notions of what an athlete is supposed to look like. This story contains the elements of fashion, music, and expressive culture, which are utilized by Ruiz to express himself and, whether intended or not, make claims to resistance and sporting entitlements. It is a Chicana/o and Central American Studies and Ethnic Studies project. Not to mention it gave people of the Imperial Valley, a border town located in southeastern California, something to be proud of during the assaultive era of the Trump presidency.

FIGURE A. Andy "The Destroyer" Ruiz Jr. at his victory parade in the city of Imperial in June 2019. Photo by Rudy Mondragón

[437] Rudy Mondragón, "Andy Ruiz is 'Destroyer' and Disrupter in Boxing, Fatphobia," in *LA Taco,* June 5, 2019, https://www.lataco.com/andy-ruiz-is-destroyer-disrupter-in-boxing-fatphobia/.

List of Interviewees

Angel Alejandro (Owner and designer of Double A Boxing) in discussion with author, October 2019.

Raymundo Beltrán (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, February 2020.

Hector Camacho Jr. (professional boxer) in discussion with author, March 2019.

José Jesus Chavez Jr. (Musical Artist) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, January 2020.

Maricela Cornejo (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, December 2017.

Donato Crowley (couture designer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón and Ise Lyfe, March 2020.

Seniesa Estrada (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, April 2018.

Robert Garcia (boxing trainer and former professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, September 2019.

Robert Guerrero (professional boxer) in discussion with author, December 2016.

Khunum Muata Ibomu aka. stic.man (Hip Hop Artist and Activist) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón and Ise Lyfe, March 2019.

Khunum Muata Ibomu aka. stic.man (Hip Hop Artist and Activist) in discussion with Gaye Theresa Johnson and Rudy Mondragón, March 2019.

Max Kellerman (ESPN) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, April 2019.

Cosmo Lombino (couture designer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón and Ise Lyfe, March 2020.

Mikko Mabanag (Marketing Manager of Churchill Boxing Gym) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, September 2019.

Abner Mares (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, February 2018.

Carlos Morales (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, January 2019.

José Carlos Ramírez (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, January 2019.

Kali Reis, “Kali Reis: Professional Midweight Champion Boxer” conducted by Rudy Mondragón in 2019, Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2020.

Kali Reis (professional boxer) in discussion with Gaye Theresa Johnson and Rudy Mondragón, April 2019.

Alex Saucedo, communication during participant observation, September 2019.

Jasiri X (Hip Hop Artist and Activist) in discussion with Gaye Theresa Johnson and Rudy Mondragón, February 2019.

Fernando Vargas (professional boxer) in discussion with Rudy Mondragón, March 2019.

Ring Entrances Analyzed

Jack Johnson vs. Tommy Burns	December 25/26, 1908
Jack Johnson vs. Jim Jeffries	July 4, 1910
Muhammad Ali vs. Earnie Shavers	September 29, 1977
Danny Lopez vs. Salvador Sanchez	June 21, 1980
Larry Homes vs. Gerry Cooney	June 11, 1982
Ray Leonard vs. Thomas Hearn	June 12, 1989
Mike Tyson vs. Donovan Ruddock	June 28, 1991
Julio Cesar Chavez vs. Hector Camacho	September 12, 1992
Mike Tyson vs. Bruce Seldon	September 7, 1996
Naseem Hamed vs. Kevin Kelley	December 19, 1997
Mike Tyson vs. Frans Botha	January 16, 1999
Naseem Hamed vs. Marco Antonio Barrera	April 7, 2001
Fernando Vargas vs. Oscar De La Hoya	September 14, 2002
Oscar De La Hoya vs. Ricardo Mayorga	May 6, 2006
Jorge Arce vs. Julio David Roque Ler	January 27, 2007
Miguel Cotto vs. Antonio Margarito	December 3, 2011
Orlando Cruz vs. Orlando Salido	October 4, 2012
Robert Guerrero vs. Floyd Mayweather Jr.	May 4, 2013
Alfredo Angulo vs. Erislandy Lara	June 8, 2013
Kali Reis vs. Teressa Perozzi	November 21, 2014
Raymundo Beltran vs. Terence Crawford	November 29, 2014
Evgeny Gradovich vs. Jayson Velez	November 29, 2014
Andre Ward vs. Sergey Kovalev	November 19, 2016
Maricela Cornejo vs. Sydney LeBlanc	April 9, 2017
Cindy Serrano vs. Iranda Paola Torres	May 13, 2017
Deontay Wilder vs. Luis Ortiz	March 3, 2018
Francisco Vargas vs. Rod Salka	April 12, 2018
Kali Reis vs. Cecilia Brækhus	May 5, 2018
Kali Reis vs. Patty Ramirez	June 30, 2018
Regis Prograis vs. Juan José Velasco	July 14, 2018
Jose Ramirez vs. Antonio Orozco	September 14, 2018
Claressa Shields vs. Ivana Habazin	January 10, 2020
Deontay Wilder vs. Tyson Fury	February 2020
Chris Colbert vs. Jaime Arboleda	December 12, 2020
Canelo Alvarez vs. Billy Joe Saunders	May 8, 2021

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