

The Mob, Racism & Mayhem They Call a Sport

Peter Werbe

2021

a review of

The Bittersweet Science; Racism, Racketeering, and the Political Economy of Boxing by Gerald Horne. International Publishers 2021

Watching two men beat the crap out of each other either in the ring or in the alley has always seemed a little boring. However, not so for followers of the brutal sport, particularly in an era gone by when fans knew the names of every champion and challenger in the different divisions down to welterweights

From the late 1890s, with figures like John L. Sullivan and Gentleman Jim Corbett, through Jack Johnson, Jack Dempsey, Joe Louis, Rocky Graziano to the 1960s and '70s with Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier, and George Foreman, the title fights were headline news.

Now, it's doubtful that one person in a hundred could name the reigning heavyweight champ. I can't.

Big fights with huge audiences like the 1974 Ali-Foreman "Rumble in the Jungle" bout in Zaire still commanded attention, but it was as if Bob Dylan's hard punching song, "Who Killed Davey Moore," about the death of a fighter in the ring signaled an end to the sport's social legitimacy.

Historian Gerald Horne, perhaps best known for his *The Counter Revolution of 1776*, tears the scab off of a horrid and corrupt enterprise with the conclusion contained in the subtitle of his latest book.

It's the marginalized Americans, particularly ones of color, and immigrants who take and give the beatings while the mob and the promoters take the cash.

As always, Horne's diligent scholarship makes history come alive and his tales of the not-so-sweet science record few heroes, but many villains.

fifth Estate

Peter Werbe
The Mob, Racism & Mayhem They Call a Sport
2021

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/410-fall-2021/the-mob-racism-mayhem-they-call-a-sport>
Fifth Estate #410, Fall, 2021

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net