Carleton University

From the SelectedWorks of Daniel McNeil

2009

Lennox Lewis and Black Atlantic Politics: The Hard Sell

Daniel McNeil

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/danielmcneil/19/

Journal of Sport & Social Issues
Volume 33 Number 1
February 2009 25-38
© 2009 Sage Publications
10.1177/0193723508328901
http://jss.sagepub.com
hosted at
http://online.sagepub.com

Lennox Lewis and Black Atlantic Politics

The Hard Sell

Daniel McNeil
University of Hull

Very little has been written about Lennox Lewis, an athlete who won the Olympic gold medal for Canada in 1988 but who was widely hailed as Britain's boxing savior when he unified various world titles in 1999. This article begins to address some of the gaps in our knowledge by placing Lewis alongside intellectual debates arising from Paul Gilroy's work on a Black Atlantic. It argues that some of the major themes of Gilroy's work—nationalism, double (or poly) consciousness, Americocentricity, and Black masculinity—are extremely useful tools for us to plot Lewis's career and to contend that a brief description of his career reminds us of the Canadian gaps in Gilroy's attempt to chart Black identities that are not just African, American, British, or Caribbean.

Keywords: *(Afro)Americocentricity; Black Atlantic; boxing; masculinity; identity; nationalism*

Fifteen years after its first publication, Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993a) continues to provoke debate. Some claim that the text is "Africaphobic" and wonder why Gilroy did not, emphatically, privilege his Black identity over and above his British identity (Christian, 2002, pp. 126-127). Others accuse Gilroy's text, with its allusions to Adorno and other "difficult" theorists, of academic posturing (Andi, 2007). Such criticisms ignore Gilroy's admiration for Black intellectuals, such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Richard Wright, who were committed to pan-Africanism and had an ambivalent relationship with academia. Yet, Gilroy's supporters can also omit crucial aspects of his humanistic project. For example, Charlie Dark's *Black Atlantic Project* (2007), a musical installation sponsored by the British Council, represented the creative artistry of musicians located in the United States and the United Kingdom but did not offer any sustained engagement with continental Europe, South America, Canada, or the Caribbean. Consequently, Dark's project represents a trend that this article tries to avoid—reducing Gilroy's political project to Black British children searching for Black role models from the United States or the United Kingdom (Ali, 2003, p. 66).

One obvious way to elucidate *The Black Atlantic*—and address its ability to move beyond the concerns of actors in the United States and the United Kingdom—is to read it alongside Gilroy's discussion of planetary humanism in *Against Race* (2000) and his collection of essays entitled *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black*

Downloaded from jss.sagepub.com at CARLETON UNIV on January 21, 2016

Cultures (1993b), not just his earlier work in *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack* (1987) or his most recent work on *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005). This article not only connects *The Black Atlantic* to some of Gilroy's other major texts, but it also engages with popular representations of Lewis by American, Canadian, and British sportswriters (broadsheet newspapers such as *The Boston Globe*, *The Guardian*, *The Globe and Mail*, as well as *The Ring*—a popular monthly magazine for American, British, and Canadian writers that claims to be "the bible of boxing"[1]). Why Lewis? He has largely been ignored by Black Atlantic studies and is noticeably absent in Gilroy's writings about the planetary humanism of Blacks in the twentieth century. Even where Gilroy wants to make the point that athletes such as Ian Wright, Denise Lewis, and Kelly Holmes represent a post-1993 entrenchment of British blackness and dutifully obtains pictures of them singing the national anthem or carrying the Union Jack, Lewis's picture is only adorned with world title belts (2007, pp. 285-288). Lest we forget, Lewis won the superheavyweight gold for Canada in 1988, just after the first publication of *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack*; secured the World Boxing Council (WBC) World Heavyweight Title when he was promoted as a British-born fighter in 1993, the same year Verso and Harvard University Press published *The Black Atlantic*; and became the undisputed champion of the world in 1999, a year before the first publication of *Against Race*. I argue that some of the major themes of Gilroy's work—nationalism, double (or poly) consciousness, Americocentricity, and Black masculinity—are extremely useful tools for us to plot Lewis's career and to contend that a brief description of his career reminds us of the Canadian gaps in Gilroy's attempt to chart Black identities that are not *just* African, American, British, or Caribbean. So, rather than provide a thick description of one of Lewis's fights or interviews, this article follows Gilroy's desire to "put down some preliminary markers for more detailed future investigation" (1993a p. xi).

What Time Is It? Nation Time!

> "I just want to take the belts home," Lewis said.
>
> "Which home?" asked one wise guy.
>
> "All of them." (Stephen Brunt, "Man of many countries," *The Globe and Mail: Canada's National Newspaper*, November 15, 1999)

There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack signaled Gilroy's dissatisfaction with sociology and cultural studies that reified the nation. He had, in his own words, "grown gradually more and more weary of having to deal with the effects of striving to analyse culture within neat, homogenous national units" (Gilroy, 1987, p. 12). This became a more "urgent obligation to reevaluate the significance of the modern nation state as a political, economic and cultural unit" in *The Black Atlantic* (1993a, p. 7), and though some critics of his work have placed Gilroy within an "antinationalist"

Downloaded from jss.sagepub.com at CARLETON UNIV on January 21, 2016

camp (Clarke, 2002), Gilroy imagines a form of cultural studies where one's loyalties were not questioned in terms of "being either for or against national history. Somewhere between the local and global there must be a place for that state and indeed for the myths and dreams of national or ethnic collectivity" (1993b, p. 68). Following Du Bois's notion of double consciousness and Richard Wright's ideas about dreadful objectivity—that the everyday experiences of Blacks challenge Enlightenment philosophers who ignore or marginalize the raciology, slavery, and terrorism that have shaped the modern world—Gilroy asks us to reevaluate writers invested in national ideologies who omit to mention a genealogy of Black struggle and only posit cultural and racial mixing in the future (1993a, pp. 213-214; see also Anderson, 2007; Buck-Morrs, 2001; Nassy Brown, 1998). In other words, Gilroy employs a notion of diaspora that valorizes "sub- and supranational kinship" with "a more ambivalent relationship toward national encampments," paying particular attention to the ways in which the culture and politics of Black America and the Caribbean have provided the "raw materials" for a Black British identity tied to resistance (Gilroy, 2000, p. 128).

With his connections to small towns like Kitchener in Ontario, city-states like London, and the national imaginations of Jamaica, Canada, and England—not to mention his oft-vaunted claims to be a citizen of the world—Lewis appears to be an exemplary member of a Black Atlantic. However, his autobiography reflects writers who ignore the findings of Black Atlantic studies and continue to imagine the post-1989 world (with well-known political and cultural "events" such as Nelson Mandela's release from prison, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the quincentenary of Columbus's encounter with a New World) as a "new" form of mixing or métissage (Lewis, 1994; see e.g., Huntington, 1993; Ifekwunigwe, 2004; Iyer, 2001; Latour, 1993). Responding to an extract from Simon Barnes of the (London) *Times*, which claimed, "one of the great examples of the blurring of boundaries is the boxer Lennox Lewis: he is British, Canadian, and Jamaican all at once: a citizen of the world: a time traveller from the next century," Lewis opined,

> Simon put into words something I'd felt for a long time. There are bits of me from all three cultures. Part of me is British, and no one can deny that. *I was born here* and I'm a West Ham supporter—how much more British can I get?
>
> But there is part of me that's from Jamaica too. Both of my parents come from there. *I'm black*. Since I've been going back there, I've got very close to the island, its people, its culture and its music. And its weather too. I like it there.
>
> But, in the same way, there's a bit of me that's Canadian as well. I went to school there. I learned my boxing there, *I grew to manhood there*, I won a gold medal for Canada at the Olympics, so a cherished part of me must still belong to Canada.
>
> How I look at it is this way: I'm a world champion, and I want to be a champion of the whole world. I want to belong to everybody. Just like Barnes said, I want to be a citizen of the world. As for the last bit, I don't think I'm ready to be a time traveller from the next century yet. I'm still working on that one (italics added).

Downloaded from jss.sagepub.com at CARLETON UNIV on January 21, 2016

This quote—intended for a reader who was located in the United Kingdom—omits to mention the twentieth-century activism of Black intellectuals like Du Bois and Wright, as well as Black Atlantic figures from earlier periods such as the Maroons of Jamaica, Canada, or Sierra Leone, who all managed to complicate national ideologies. In using the "fact of blackness" to substantiate his Jamaican identity (and not his Canadian or British identities), Lewis also highlights the ease with which popular notions of blackness can be tied to multiracial countries like Jamaica and marginalized from popular conceptions of Canada and Britain.

Buffalo Soldier

> A dreadlocked warrior of Jamaican ancestry. (Nigel Collins, "A new look at Lennox Lewis," *The Ring,* August 2000)

Gilroy mentions the importance of Rastafarian culture in a number of his texts. For example, his critique of Saatchi and Saatchi's infamous advertisement for the Conservative Party ("Labour says he's black; Tories say he's British") emphasizes their choice of a youngish Black man "shorn of his dreadlocks" (1987, p. 59), and he lists the oppositional function of Rastafarian symbols in *The Black Atlantic* (1993a, p. 198). We should not, however, overlook Gilroy's awareness of other readings, especially when he claims that Bob Marley's image has, after his death in 1981, been incorporated into a system of global capital that markets him as a dreadlocked neominstrel rather than a man committed to pan-African liberation (2000, pp. 132-133; see also G. Stephens, 1999). This is important because boxing journalists in *The Ring* use Lewis's dreadlocks and his love of reggae music to question his commitment to a fighting game.

> Lewis likes to call himself a "citizen of the planet," which is a righteous notion, but as a fighter, it leaves him with an *ambiguous* [italic added] fight base. He might wear dreadlocks, but he's not Bob Marley preaching universal brotherhood. He's the heavyweight champion of the world, kicking ass among a species not yet ready to give up its chauvinistic tendencies . . . we need an extreme edge to give us the rush we crave. (Collins, "Learning to love Lennox, doctor of 'Boxingology,'" April 2001)

Such comments must also be read alongside African American film critics, like Armond White (2008) of *The New York Press*, who consider it strange that "post-racial" superheroes do not wear dreadlocks, "that amusing signifier of black congeniality that reassuringly harkens back to the college years' weed-seller and reggae fan at variance with that angry afro'd guy in the black students' union" (2008).

Aside from linking Lewis's dreadlocks to a superficial reading of Bob Marley that stresses racial accommodationism and unthreatening stoners, Afro(Americo)centric

Downloaded from jss.sagepub.com at CARLETON UNIV on January 21, 2016

writers tie the boxer's demeanor to respectful and unflamboyant role models whose bodies are deemed "ethnically ambiguous." The term "articulate," often used to describe mixed-race individuals in North America, from political figures like Barack Obama to sporting icons like Tiger Woods, Jarome Iginla, and Derek Jeter, is also a staple of journalistic reports about Lewis.[2] Prominent mixed-race figures inspire cultural commentators writers like Wynter to "linger, not just on the total package of good looks, but on each of the parts, in a vain attempt to calculate the racial whole" (2002, p. 161), illuminating Gilroy's summary of advertising in the "over-developed world" in which,

> the perfect faces on billboards and screens and in magazines are no longer exclusively white, but as they lose that uniformity we are being pressed to consider and appreciate exactly what they have become, where they fit in the old hierarchy that is being erased, and what illicit combination of those familiar racial types combined to produce that particular look, that exotic style, or that transgressive stance. The stimulating pattern of this hyper-visibility supplies the signature of a corporate multiculturalism in which some degree of difference from an implicit white norm may be highly prized as a sign of timeliness, vitality, inclusivity and global reach. (Gilroy, 2000, p. 21)

This carefully phrased passage—noting the importance of an exotic identity with some degree of difference instead of a militant Black culture—not only relates to the outward symbols of color, but also reminds us about the clichés of mixed-race angst when confronted with a form of Black nationalism that contradicts the moral framework of their White parents (Obama, 1995, p. 184).

Lewis can align himself with the rhetoric of Black power offered by sports stars such as Dennis Rodman and Brian Lara, as well as less well-known figures like the Caribbean cricketers in the north of England described in Ben Carrington's case study of Black resistance, who consider it a matter of "common sense" that they would work/play harder against Whites than other Blacks (1998, p. 293 n7). However, the comparison with Jeter, Obama, Iginla, and other mixed-race icons remains important if we are to contextualize Lewis's rise to fame with the development of an African Canadian label. Now a staple of mainstream journalism, the term grew in popularity in the 1980s to support longstanding desires for "positive male role models" with "one drop of black blood" who could inspire a supposedly nihilistic Black underclass in the United States, as well as the consolidation of professional organizations dedicated to Black Britons (Gilroy, 1993a; West, 1994). As Gamal Abdel-Shield notes in his study of Black masculinities and sporting cultures in Canada and Ben Carrington asserts in his work on double consciousness and the Black British athlete, much more work is needed on the ways in which Black athletes were encouraged to enter the national club during the times of Thatcher and Trudeau, Major and Mulroney. So, along with the media support offered to Black athletes like Daniel Igali who continually profess their loyalty to Queen and country (Abdel-Shield, 2005, pp. 4, 92), and the venom unleashed on athletes such as

Downloaded from jss.sagepub.com at CARLETON UNIV on January 21, 2016

Linford Christie who "moan too much about racism" (Carrington, 2000, p. 151), it is worth recalling Lewis's inability to find a role as a pantomime hero or villain with Canadian and British fight fans. In fact, he could only be cast as a shy British gentleman in the twenty-first century when American commentators sought to tame his connections to Black cultures that seemed too diffuse, ambiguous, and outernational.

From a Canadian Cockney to an "Enigmatic Englishman"

> Americans have never warmed to him. Britons think he's an imposter, Canadians have pretty much forgotten he's one of their own. (Stephen Brunt, "Lewis likes to say he's from England," *The Globe and Mail*, October 2, 1997)

After witnessing journalists transform Ben Johnson from a Canadian hero into a Jamaican criminal when he failed a drugs test at the Seoul Olympics, Lewis made it clear that he "was throwing (punches) for myself, my mother [and] Canada" (*Globe and Mail*, September 29, 1988). Unsurprisingly, he was celebrated as a positive role model and received the Order of Canada, Canadian Sportsman of the Year, and Harry Jerome Award (for African Canadian achievement) between 1988 and 1989. Nonetheless, this Canadian identity can also be seen to hinder a fighter's image when writers still tend to associate the nation with peace and toleration—imaging it as the final stop of the Underground Railroad rather than a site of slave rebellion. Indeed, Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* treats Canada as a "blunt irrelevance" (Clarke, 2002, p. 8), and it only appears as a place of refuge for Martin Delany (allowing the iconic figure of Black nationalism to write about the acts of resistance he carried out elsewhere [Gilroy, 1993a, pp. 20, 27]), or an imagined sanctuary for Donald Byrd (so that there is no space for Gilroy to examine how the legendary jazz musician's image of a tolerant Canada was destroyed [1993a, p. 18]). Rather than stay in a nation that tended to emphasize its "peace-building role" and was unable to offer a well-developed infrastructure or marketing machine for heavyweight boxers, Lewis spent much of his professional career outside of Canada. Yet, in contrast to the Black Atlantic cultures symbolized by Delany, or the continual movement symbolized by Donald Byrd's musical odyssey, Lewis hoped to root himself as a world champion the British public could call their own.

Lewis carried a red and white maple leaf to the ring in his first professional fight and told journalists that he'd "like to return home to Canada," but his tour of English cities quickly demanded a new marketing approach (*Globe and Mail*, June 28 and July 21, 1989). Working under the British-based promotions company of Frank Maloney, Lewis was sold as Britain's most exciting heavyweight prospect for many years, "back home after 12 years of exile in Canada" and a 24-year-old East Londoner (*Hull Daily Mail*, October 10 and 11, 1989). This was a tough sell: In North America, he was still considered a "British-based Canadian" (*The Ring*,

Downloaded from jss.sagepub.com at CARLETON UNIV on January 21, 2016

February 1990) and when he declared his support for the "British Bulldog" against the Canadian Bret "Hitman" Hart in *Summerslam* 1992 (the wrestling pay-per-view held in Wembley, England), journalists in North America tended to describe Lewis as a mercenary who only wrapped himself in the Union Jack for commercial purposes (*Boston Globe*, September 23, 1994; *Globe and Mail*, October 30, 1992, and May 10, 1993).

Journalists in Britain were also suspicious of attempts to market Lewis as a native hero. Given his Jamaican ancestry, Lewis was haunted by the infamous opinions of the former Conservative MPs Enoch Powell (1968) and Norman Tebbitt (1990) who racialized the immigration debate in the United Kingdom when they questioned the Englishness of people with West Indians and Asians forefathers (rather than, e.g., Australians and Canadians). As Gilroy perceptively noted in an article first published in the *New Statesman* in 1990, Britain's popular culture was far more amenable to Frank Bruno (a capable fighter who flaunted with his Tory politics and English roots) than John Barnes (an outstanding footballer who only occasionally declared his support for the Conservative Party and retained a Jamaican passport). Ultimately, Barnes "remains an enigmatic and peripheral figure, drifting aimlessly on the wind of national life . . . he seems unlikely ever to get stuck in the hard graft involved in being British" (Gilroy, 1993b, pp. 86-87). Similar adjectives littered commentary on Lennox Lewis's fight with Bruno in 1993 so that "Lewis comes off cool, aloof, intelligent, perhaps arrogant; Bruno as dopey and harmless. When it comes to sporting heroes, at least black sporting heroes, the Brits clearly prefer the latter" (*Globe and Mail*, October 1, 1993). Tellingly, Lewis would attack Bruno as an "Uncle Tom," employing a term associated with Josiah Henderson, a well-known figure in African American and African Canadian folklore, as much as Harriet Beecher Stowe. Lewis later retracted his comment when the comment incited a rare declaration of Black pride from Bruno (Carrington, 2000) and failed to resonate with British fight fans who were largely unaware of the label's history in the U.S. civil war or Underground Railroad. Without Bruno's ability to play with indigenous sporting icons and commentators, Lewis would only win British Sports Personality of the Year after he had consolidated his position as an "'enigmatic Englishman" in the United States.

Even after signing a six-fight HBO deal in 1998 and obtaining the WBC World, American journalists, Lewis was still marketed as a stranger in a strange land (*The Ring*, December 2000). Questioning Lewis's place in the Canadian pantheon of sporting heroes only meant that he was ensconced within a British label—he is listed in *The Ring's* all-time Top 10 British Fighters but is nowhere to be found in Canada's compilation of boxing champions and has found his induction into Canada's sports Hall of Fame shrouded in controversy. Yet, much like American stereotypes about Canadian blandness, Lewis's English identity was simply used as a euphemism for a "boring fighter" with strange manners and a stranger accent. Sometimes Lewis's "English civility" was represented by his love of tea, and sometimes it was reduced to his accent and his love of chess:

Downloaded from jss.sagepub.com at CARLETON UNIV on January 21, 2016

> No matter what he does, some guys will never take to Lennox Lewis. Maybe it's the British accent, which to many of us in America, just never seems right coming out of the mouth of a fighter, especially a heavyweight. Maybe it's the manners, the chess; we don't care much for erudite fighters either, even if we don't' like to admit it. (*The Ring*, January, June, August, and October 2000)

Lewis was also said to lack "content and feeling" (*The Ring*, September 1994), evoking the well-known expression of Negritude by Leopold Senghor, president of Senegal from 1960 to 1981, that "emotion is to Negro as reason is to Greek." In Gilroy's words, we are also reminded of the physical prowess "to which blacks were given a special title in exchange for their disassociation from the mind" (2000, p. 22). Film critics accepted White British villains—such as Alan Rickman in *Die Hard* (1988) and *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (1991)—who were able to display their charisma when they stole scenes from their Hollywood counterparts in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but boxing writers felt that Lewis lacked their theatricality. He was also unable to "pass" as a dynamic hero who journalists would welcome as the perfect next-door neighbor or brother-in-law (*The Ring*, August 2000). In American magazines, Lewis's Englishness might have been suitable for a servile role on popular comedies such as *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (1990-1996), but it was deemed unsuitable for assertive heroes like Will Smith who could proclaim independence day (Emmerich, 1996) or, more pointedly, claim to harness the spirit of Muhammad Ali (Mann, 2001).[3]

Lewis's inability to crossover into American popular culture illuminates two strands of Henry Louis Gates's oft-repeated description of Black Britain. For while the W. E. B. Du Bois Professor of the Humanities and the director of the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Studies at Harvard talked to Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, and other prominent Black British intellectuals, he ended up focusing on (a) middle-class Blacks who hold a "slightly romantic view of black America . . . as a Cotswold village populated by Oprah Winfrey, Bill Cosby, Michael Jordan, Terry McMillan, Spike Lee, Michael Jackson, Quincy Jones, Vernon Jordan, and dozens more of their ilk," and (b) wondered why working-class people of African descent in London did not sound "Black," that is, "Black American" (Gates, 1997). Gates's first point manages to illuminate the limited freedom dreams of some middle-class Blacks in the United Kingdom, especially if they, like Gilroy, went in search of a Black musical culture in the United States that did not exist and may never have existed in the way in which they imagined it as young people in England (1993a, p. 109). Yet Gates's second point only confirms an AfroAmericocentric vision, which places blackness outside of Europe and fails to acknowledge, for example, the distinctive inflections of a Black London accent. Such an AfroAmericocentric position means that Lewis, like Gilroy, was questioned for his failure to match the oft-quoted demand for "authenticity" (Gilroy, 1993a, pp. 96-99).

The proponents of "racial authenticity" can be described as a "Soul Patrol" (Funderburg, 1994) or claim to represent "the wisdom of the African American

Downloaded from jss.sagepub.com at CARLETON UNIV on January 21, 2016

community" (Asante, 2000), but Gilroy tries to dismiss them with a few caustic remarks in *The Black Atlantic*:

> Afrocentricity may be useful in developing communal discipline . . . and even in galvanising black communities to resist the encroachments of crack cocaine, but . . . supplies a poor basis for the writing of cultural history and the calculation of political choices. (1993a, p. 188)

Published shortly after *The Black Atlantic*, Lewis Gordon's *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism* also helps us to elucidate the decisions of a Black writer who refused to "waste his time attacking Afrocentricity" (1995, p. 120). Yet, whereas Gordon's writer rejected a sustained rebuttal of Afrocentric ambitions because they did not have the "political organising capabilities" of Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* or James's *Beyond a Boundary*, *The Black Atlantic* said little about Fanon and James. Arguing that their work is well known, if not well read, Gilroy chose to provoke debate and discussion about American-born icons with a cosmopolitan outlook who are still claimed in an aggressively nationalist manner by (Afro)Americocentric writers. Sharing a similar premise, my conclusion briefly notes how the life of political struggle championed by Fanon and James is not necessarily useful for an understanding of Lennox Lewis's boxing career. Proposing a comparison with another sporting icon of late capitalism, I address Gilroy's fear of infantile British citizens who project a picture of England "derived entirely from US scripts and statecraft" (2005, p. 139).

The Masculine Global Imaginary

> I am always going to be 10 times more famous than David Beckham—Lennox Lewis (2003). (Maume, 2003)

Gilroy is well aware of the incessant demand for "positive male role models" and the roll call of "Marcus, Malcolm, Martin, Marley, Mandela" during Black history month (1993a, p. 194, 1993b, p. 196). I have briefly noted his discussion of Bob Marley in *Against Race*, but it is also worth knowing that *The Black Atlantic* alludes to the "cultural protectionism" of Spike Lee (which was evident in his attack on Norman Jewison and any other White director who was enlisted to direct a Malcolm X biopic) and modern leaders such as "Martin Luther King, Jr. and Marcus Garvey . . . who drew on the power of Old Testament patriarchy to cement their own political authority" (pp. 96, 207). Mandela, a living icon connected to the self-fashioning project of many young Blacks, was especially important for Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* because

> his release from prison projected an unchallenged patriarchal voice, a voice rooted in the most intense political conflict between blacks and whites on this planet, the final frontier of white supremacy on the African continent, out across the relay systems of the black Atlantic. (Gilroy, 1993a, p. 96)

Downloaded from jss.sagepub.com at CARLETON UNIV on January 21, 2016

Mandela, a decent amateur boxer, often praises the noble virtues of its fighters and offered consoling words to Lennox Lewis after his defeat to the African American Rahman in South Africa in 2001 (Marquesee, 1995, p. 4). This was an important gesture because the boxing press was far from sympathetic. Put bluntly, Lewis was viewed as a lazy competitor who preferred to act on the set of *Ocean's Eleven* (2001) with the likes of Brad Pitt and George Clooney rather than acclimatize to the high altitude of Brakpan, the casino and mining town on the outskirts of Johannesburg that was hosting the fight. Combined with his good looks and "British" reserve, Lewis's jaunts with men labeled the "sexiest alive" by *People Magazine* (1995 and 2000 for Pitt, 1997 and 2006 for Clooney) meant that gossip about his sexual orientation reached a tipping point and provoked Lewis's infamous retort: "I am 100% a woman's man" (Nyuland, 2004).

Given Lewis's remarks to the press core, the most useful comparison to Lewis may be David Beckham, runner-up to Lewis in 1999 and winner of the BBC Sports Personality of the Year Award in 2001. There are many factors in Beckham's successful image—from the story of the working-class boy "done good" to the celebrity of his wife—but it is worth noting that nonwhiteness and queerness were mapped onto a body that did not confound *national* identities. That is to say, Beckham lent his name to a feature film about a South Asian diaspora and women's rights (2002), African American rap stars (Missy Elliot and Jay-Z, *Wake Up*, 2003), and celebrated his role as a "gay icon" in magazine interviews, but, even during his time in Spain and the United States, he remained a (White, straight) Englishman abroad (Cashmore, 2002; Cashmore & Parker, 2003; Morris, 2005; Rahman, 2004, Whannel, 2002). On the other hand, Lewis lacked an English or Canadian narrative that could be sold in the United States partly because the Canadian aspect of his biography was marginalized in his early fights in the United Kingdom, partly because he was competing in a sport, and a division that has been dominated by Americans, and partly because his blackness was only rooted to Jamaica.

Caribbean-born intellectuals such as James and Fanon warned us about "citizenship . . . being turned into a new form of slavery—citizenship as the very absence of free movement" and a "closed society in which life has no taste, in which the air is tainted, in which ideas and men are corrupt" (Fanon, 1967, p. 224; M. A. Stephens, 2005, p. 273). To borrow one of Gilroy's favorite expressions, it bears repetition that Lewis was stranded with straitjackets representing Canada, British, or Jamaican stereotypes rather than the ships used to represent Black Atlantic artistry.[4] He could move from one nation to another but doubts were continually cast on his character, suspicions that are reflective of debates in all three countries about dual allegiance (from members of Parliament in Jamaica who were said to hold U.S. passports to the Canadian governor-general renouncing her French citizenship and Conservative Party plans to establish a grand committee at Westminster only open to English members of Parliament). Although he was unable to develop a bland and inoffensive multicultural image that was quite as powerful as the Beckham brand, Lewis's career

Downloaded from jss.sagepub.com at CARLETON UNIV on January 21, 2016

reminds us that Gilroy's planetary humanism is not only forged against the constraints of national ideologies, but it also launches sorties against forms of governance and global capitalism that need non-White bodies to be shifty and shifting (Ahmed, 2008; McNeil, 2004)

Building on Krisitina Dryza, trend specialist and Contributing Consumer Insight Editor for *Breaking Trends* (a research consortium for Microsoft, British Telecommunications, Virgin, and J Walter Thompson), *Trendwatching* coined the phrase transumers to refer to transatlantic consumers who were "driven by experiences instead of the 'fixed,' by entertainment, by discovery, by fighting boredom, who increasingly live a transient lifestyle, freeing themselves from the hassles of permanent ownership and possessions" (2006). We are, in short, dealing with a new spin on Norman Mailer's *The White Negro* (1957), a piece of romantic racism that encouraged White hipsters to rail against soul-destroying institutions with a little help from a badass Black culture, or at least middle-class figures using their disposable income to seek transient thrills in a way that is condemned when it is carried out by supposedly "irresponsible" Black underclass or "mixed race, culturally rootless consumers" (Griffin, 2004). A close reading of Gilroy's work reveals his ongoing resistance to these myths. On one hand, Gilroy has consistently positioned himself against the racial and class prejudice inherent in the attempts to locate pleasure and immediate gratification on a Black underclass or mixed-race cuckoos in the national nest. On the other hand, he has rejected a top-down form of multiculturalism that craves infantile consumers rather than a convivial multiculture filled with critical debate. From *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack* to his most recent work in *Black Britain*, he has mourned the loss of a Black political culture tied to resistance and sneered at "governments who are keen to disguise their authoritarian character by sprinkling a glittery, multicultural crust over the horrible social consequences of increasing inequality," as well as "the empty dreams of consumer culture" that is the lingua franca for bored and disenchanted youth accepting "something shallower" (2007, pp. 308, 257).

Critics will continue to lampoon Gilroy's comments for their arrogance and Left Melancholia, especially when he lavishes praise on the creativity and cosmopolitanism of his own generation, placed "between the citizen-immigrants of the 1950s and the more assertively British-born groups that succeeded them [especially after 1993]" (Gilroy, 2007, p. 248). Yet, along with the recent debates about the legitimacy of Lewis's place in Canada's Sports Hall of Fame, Gilroy's schema is a powerful reminder that Lewis's multinational and unflamboyant persona failed to satisfy the hopes of citizen-immigrants, Black Atlantic radicals, or transumers distracted by brash icons in the overdeveloped world.

Notes

1. The integrity of *The Ring* was questioned after it was found to overrate some of Don King's fighters in 1974 (Barra, 2001). I use its profiles of fights and fighters—rather than its ranking system—to

Downloaded from jss.sagepub.com at CARLETON UNIV on January 21, 2016

assess the image of Lewis circulated by a still influential magazine (one that is regularly cited by ESPN and HBO).

2. See, for example, Joe Lapointe, "Canada's 'big tree' has bright future," *New York Times*, January 5, 1996; "Tracking Tiger: Calgary's Jarome Iginla hopes to follow Tiger Woods' footsteps, leading the way for more *African Americans* to join him in his sport," *Denver Post*, March 9, 1997, italics added; Guy Lawson, "The last pioneer," *GQ: Gentleman's Quarterly*, October 2002; Mike Freeman, "Somehow, widespread praise eludes Lewis," *New York Times*, June 21, 2003; Frank Keating, **"**Hail Lewis the Wessex man," *The Guardian*, February 6, 2004; Editorial, "Democrats' Tiger Woods: Barack Obama's cultures, youth stand out," *Dallas Morning News*, July 28, 2004; Estanislao Oziewicz, "'Tiger Woods' of U.S. politics drives home a victory," *Globe and Mail*, November 3, 2004.

3. An Afro-Saxon butler was used in *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, the popular sitcom starring Will Smith to mine laughs from the presumed incompatibility of "the Queen's English" and a Black body. It should also be noted that a non-American Black was useful for producers to erase the so-called mulatto or house Negro from an African American identity in the 1990s, just as African American actors are asked to effect Jamaican accents when they become servants for rich White families in Hollywood films such as *The Wedding Crashers* (2005).

4. "It bears repetition," a staple of the lecture hall that Gilroy's critics can use to link his work to an "ivory tower" rather than "activist-intellectuals," appears throughout his work. See, for example, Gilroy (1993a, pp. 105, 155, 218, 223; 1997, pp. 24, 32; 2000, pp. 59, 165, 237).

References

Abdel-Shield, G. (2005). *Who da man? Black masculinities and sporting cultures*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Ahmed, S. (2008). Multiculturalism and the promise of happiness. *New Formations, 63,* 121-137.

Ali, S. (2003). *Mixed-race, post-race: Gender, new ethnicities, and cultural practices.* Oxford, UK: Berg.

Anderson, M. (2007). The relevance of the Black Atlantic in contemporary sport: Racial imaginaries in Norway. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 42*(1), 65-81.

Andi, S. (2007, October). *The truth in knowing/now: A conversation across the African diaspora*. United Kingdom: University of Hull.

Asante, M. (2000, August). *Afrocentricity: Toward a new understanding of African thought in this millennium*. England, UK: University of Liverpool.

Barra, A. (2001, November 22). Lennox Lewis and the decline and fall of boxing. *Salon.* Retrieved Novem 25, 2008, from http://www.salon.com/news/sports/col/barra/2001/11/22/boxing/

Buck-Morris, S. (2001). Hegel and Haiti. In S. Hassan & I. Dadi (Eds.), *Unpacking Europe: Towards a critical reading* (pp. 42-70). Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen.

Carrington, B. (1998). Sport, masculinity and black cultural resistance. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 22*(3), 275-298.

Carrington, B. (2000). Double consciousness and the Black British athlete. In K. Owusu (Ed.), *Black British culture and society. A text reader* (pp. 133-156). London: Routledge.

Cashmore, E. (2002). *Beckham*. Oxford: Polity Press.

Cashmore, E., & Parker, A. (2003). One David Beckham? Celebrity, masculinity and the Soccerati. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 20*(3), 214-231.

Christian, M. (2002). The Black intellectual/activist tradition: Notes on the past, present and future. In M. Christian (Ed.), *Black identity in the 20th century: Expressions of the US and UK African diaspora* (pp. 119-136). London: Hansib.

Clarke, G. E. (2002). *Odysseys home: Mapping African-Canadian literature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Downloaded from jss.sagepub.com at CARLETON UNIV on January 21, 2016

Dark, C. (2007). *Black Atlantic Project 2006/7*. Retrieved July 27, 2007, from http://www.britishcouncil.org/usa-arts-music-black-atlantic-project.htm

Emmerich, R. (1996). *Independence day* [Motion picture]. United States: Centropolis Entertainment.

Fanon, F. (1967). *Black skin, White masks*. New York: Grove Press.

Funderburg, L. (1994). *Black, White, Other: Biracial Americans talk about race and identity*. New York: William Morrow.

Gates Jr., H. L. (1997, April 28, May 6). Black Britain. *The New Yorker.* (Reprinted in K. Owusu [Ed.]. [2000]. *Black British culture and society: A text reader.* London: Routledge.)

Gilroy, P. (1987). *"There ain't no Black in the Union Jack": The cultural politics of race and nation*. London: Hutchinson.

Gilroy, P. (1993a). *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Gilroy, P. (1993b). *Small acts: Thoughts on the politics of Black cultures.* London: Serpent's Tail.

Gilroy, P. (1997). Exer(or)cising Power: Black bodies in the Black public sphere" in H. Thomas (Ed), *Dance in the City*. New York: St. Martin's.

Gilroy, P. (2000). *Against race: Imagining political culture beyond the color line*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Gilroy, P. (2005). *Postcolonial melancholia.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Gilroy, P. (2007). *Black Britain: A photographic history*. London: Saqi.

Gordon, L. R. (1995). *Bad faith and Antiblack racism*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press.

Griffin, N. (2004, July 7). *The great debate*. Retrieved May 1, 2006, from http://www.bnp.org.uk/great_debate/july01.htm

Howe, S. (1998). *Afrocentrism: Mythical pasts and imagined homes*. London: Verso.

Huntington, S. (1993, Summer). Clash of civilizations? *Foreign Affairs*, 22-49.

Ifekwunigwe, J. O. (2004). Introduction. In J. Ifekwunigwe (Ed.), *"Mixed-race" studies reader* (pp. 1-36). London: Routledge.

Iyer, P. (2001). *The global soul: Jet lags, shopping malls, and the search for home*. New York: Vintage.

Latour, B. (1993). *We have never been modern*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lewis, L. (1994). *The autobiography of the WBC heavyweight champion of the world*. London: Faber & Faber.

Mailer, N. (1957). *The White Negro*. San Francisco: City Lights.

Mann, M. (2001). *Ali* [Motion picture]. Unites States: Columbia Pictures.

Marquesee, M. (1995). Sport and stereotype: From role model to Muhammed Ali. *Race and Class, 36*(4), 1-30.

Maume, C. (2003, December 29). "From Jordan to Jonny: Quotes of the year. *The Independent*.

McNeil, D. (2004). Dancing across borders: Multiculturalism on screen. *Bright Lights Film Journal,* 44(1). Retrieved July 15, 2008, from http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/44/pan.htm

Morris, S. (2005, August 1). From the tragic to the bland: Observations on icons. *New Statesman*. Retrieved August 1, 2008, from http://www.newstatesman.com/200508010009

Nassy Brown, J. (1998). Black Liverpool, Black America, and the gendering of diasporic space. *Cultural Anthropology, 13*(3), 291-325.

Nyuland, D. (2004). When in Rome: Heterosexism, homophobia and sports talk radio. *Sport and Social Issues, 28*(2), 136-168.

Obama, B. (1995). *Dreams from my father: A story of race and inheritance*. New York: Times Books.

Rahman, M. (2004). Is straight the new queer? David Beckham and the dialectics of celebrity. *M/C Journal, 7*(5). Retrieved December 1, 2007, from http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0411/15-rahman.php

Stephens, G. (1999). *On racial frontiers: The new culture of Frederick Douglass, Ralph Ellison, and Bob Marley*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Stephens, M. A. (2005). *Black empire: The masculine global imaginary of Caribbean intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Downloaded from jss.sagepub.com at CARLETON UNIV on January 21, 2016

Trendwatching. (2006, November). *Transumers*. Retrieved September 19, 2007, from http://www.trendwatching.com/trends/transumers.htm
West, C. (1994). *Race matters*. New York: Vintage Books.
Whannel, G. (2002). *Media sport stars: Masculinities and moralities*. London: Routledge.
White, A. (2008, July). *The pursuit of crappyness*. New York: New York Press.
Wynter, L. (2002). *American skin: Pop culture, big business and the end of White America*. New York: Crown.

Daniel McNeil is Lecturer in Black and Minority studies at the University of Hull/Wilberforce Institute for the study of Slavery and Emancipation. d.mcneil@hull.ac.uk

Downloaded from jss.sagepub.com at CARLETON UNIV on January 21, 2016