

supposed to be the “racial truth” of their bodies, passers throw racial logic conflating identity with ontology into confusion (117). This explains why the jury in *Rhineland* ruled for Alice’s inability to pass. They did not wish to confront the possibility that all racial identity is a matter of passing, for this reveals the whole nexus of racial regulation itself as derived from nothing but cultural codes and social strictures.

Ehlers has written a cogent, insightful monograph that reexamines the philosophical roots of critical race theory, reviving and innovating on bedrock scholarship to pose new answers to questions which have long consumed interested scholarly audiences. Useful to historians as much as to critics, *Racial Imperatives* charts the cultural logic which produces racialized subjectivity and exposes the limits of that logic. In so doing, Ehlers makes her mark with the best of the theorists with whom she so enthusiastically engages.

***The Sport of Kings and the Kings of Crime: Horse Racing, Politics, and Organized Crime in New York, 1865–1913.***

By Steven A. Reiss. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011, 446 pages, \$45.00 Cloth.

Reviewed by Jennifer E. Steenshorne, Associate Editor, *The Selected Papers of John Jay*

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Until the 1950s, thoroughbred (flat) horse racing was by far the most important and popular sport in the United States, “long before people cared one whit about professional basketball, hockey, or football” (xi). This was, as Steven A. Reiss shows us, in large part due to the sport’s connection with gambling, not only illegal sports betting (always in existence) but organized, legal betting at race tracks. *Sport of Kings* traces the rise of horseracing in New York, its emerging dominance as a sport, efforts to police the sport, and the concurrent rise of legal and illegal gambling, set against the backdrop of Gilded Age politics and Progressive reform. This is a fascinating and complex story, blending, like the track itself, characters from the height of society and the lowest poolroom, and the blurred lines between criminality and legality. For example, horse racing was a sport in which August Belmont II, the Rothschild banker, was linked with Arthur

Rothstein, the professional gambler. *Sport of Kings* largely succeeds in telling the story of how politics, organized crime, high society, and low life converged at the track, in a detailed and compelling way, offering much to the scholar of sport and of gambling, the student of New York history, and the horse racing enthusiast, but also to those interested in the larger socio-political and economic processes of the period.

Reiss's stated purpose is to answer three questions: "first, how and why New York State became the national center of horse racing after the Civil War, second, how and why it maintained that status until the state government briefly halted horse racing in the early 1910s, and third, how and why legal and illegal gambling flourished in that era" (xiii). His unstated purpose is to chart the connection of these questions to urban politics and the rise of organized crime. Reiss has explored this theme before, in *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (1989), noting that "baseball, boxing, and the turf all had close ties to urban politics, reflecting the dominant role of urban machine politicians in many cities like New York" (xvi). Horse racing thrived because of machine politics, but machine politicians and gambling syndicates were just as much the beneficiaries of the opportunities racing provided them.

Reiss's research draws on a broad and varied group of sources, enabling him to address different aspects of his study that may have been missed had he limited himself to one type of material. For example, the importance of media to his story is revealed by his use of newspapers and magazines of the era. He draws on archival collections, such as the Belmont family papers, government reports, legal documents, contemporary accounts and exposés of gambling, contemporary newspapers (both "straight" and the racing press) and journals, and racing records. The secondary sources are just as varied, reflecting the larger context of this work. Particularly impressive is Reiss's account of the birth of the Jockey Club, as that organization's institutional records are not, to my knowledge, currently accessible.

The narrative of *Sport of Kings* is "chronological and topical" (xviii), which creates some overlap between chapters, perhaps unavoidable considering the amount of material covered. The information is also quite dense, with vivid descriptions of colorful track life contrasting with detailed accounts of legislative and legal processes. Chapter one is a very valuable overview of the history of racing in the United States, which could stand

alone as an introduction to the subject. It also introduces themes that run throughout the story, such as the mixing of high and low cultures, regional rivalries, and the centrality of gambling. Other important themes that emerge are the formation of elites into self-regulating bodies (ultimately the Jockey Club) to combat regulation from outside; the constantly shifting alliances between Tammany, illegal off-track gamblers, and the track owners; and the pressure from reformers, another odd alliance of urban Progressives and rural conservatives.

One of the many strengths of the book is Reiss's exploration of how horse racing, gambling, and crime were not on the periphery of urban life, but fully integrated in the social and economic lives of its inhabitants. This is particularly explored in chapter three, in the discussion of racing in Brooklyn. Racetracks (and gambling) not only provided entertainment for Brooklyn's inhabitants, but employment, both at the track, and in the supporting businesses that catered to the tracks themselves (stables, hay suppliers) and their denizens (cafes, transportation). Transportation expanded in response to the need to bring race goers to the tracks. "Legitimate" businesses were linked to gambling in surprising ways. For example, a large part of Western Union's business was transmitting race results to pool-rooms across the country. When confronted by authorities, the company denied any complicity on their part, for they were merely transmitting information. Newspapers increased circulation by providing racing results and news, and a specialized press developed.

The weaknesses of this study largely derive from its scale. Groups, such as "elites," "reformers," and "evangelicals," are described in broad terms, with very little examination of nuances of type. English racing and the transnational character of racing (particularly during periods of bans) is underexplored. Other forms of horse racing, such as harness racing and steeple chasing, are also barely mentioned. These topics, and others which are suggested but not developed in this book, would be excellent topics for future studies, by Reiss or others.

Gambling is central to this book, despite elite supporters' protestations that horse racing was necessary to agriculture, for the "improvement of the breed" (17, 18, 351). Reiss sees the popularity of gambling, both legal and illegal, as crossing class and cultural boundaries. Gambling was a way for the (largely male) public to display expertise and manliness. When women

intruded upon this masculine space, and engaged in the masculine activity of gambling in public, as Reiss shows, it was threatening for reformers. Similarly to T. Jackson Lears, Reiss sees gambling as the “product” of a culture that valorized risk, from colonization onwards. One would like to see a more extended discussion of this connection, and the connection between economic practices to those of organized crime. Reiss’s description of the intertwined connections between gambling syndicates and machine politics and the process by which the gamblers infiltrated politics, could very well be applied to the activities of such industrial capitalist risk takers as John D. Rockefeller and the elite members of the Jockey Club. Anti-gambling crusades can be seen as a criticism of the speculative economy, and as a way of attacking the financiers who led racing.

*Sport of Kings* is, in essence, a case study in how politics in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era worked. Far from being peripheral to the socio-political and economic history, the story of the rise of horse racing, gambling, and organized crime in New York perhaps reveals more about that history than more conventional topics.

### ***When Wall Street Met Main Street: The Quest for an Investors’ Democracy.***

By Julia C. Ott. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011, 313 pages, \$35.00 Cloth.

Reviewed by Joseph E. Hower, Southwestern University

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**T**he financial crisis of 2007-2008 sparked new academic interest in the history of capitalism. In recent years, Columbia University Press launched a book series, Harvard initiated a workshop program, the Newberry Library inaugurated a seminar, and Cornell University initiated a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). Books on the subject dominate major prize lists. A growing number of universities now feature undergraduate lectures and graduate courses on the topic. Fusing older methods of business and economic history with the questions and insights of social and cultural history, scholars insist on capitalism’s central importance to fundamental questions about modern American politics, culture, and society.

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