



1-1-2010

## Review of the book Olympic Industry Resistance, by Jefferson Lenskyj, H. (2008)

Allison Harthcock

*Butler University*, [aharthco@butler.edu](mailto:aharthco@butler.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/ccom\\_papers](http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/ccom_papers)



Part of the [Communication Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Harthcock, Allison, "Review of the book Olympic Industry Resistance, by Jefferson Lenskyj, H. (2008)" / (2010): -.  
Available at [http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/ccom\\_papers/5](http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/ccom_papers/5)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Communication at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scholarship and Professional Work - Communication by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact [fgaede@butler.edu](mailto:fgaede@butler.edu).

Lenskyj, Helen Jefferson. *Olympic Industry Resistance: Challenging Olympic Power and Propaganda*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008. 182 pp.

Reviewed by: Allison Harthcock

With her book *Olympic Industry Resistance*, Lenskyj continues her long and valuable tradition of critique of the Olympic industry, including articles such as "When Winners are Losers: Toronto and Sydney Bids for the Summer Olympics" (*Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 1996), "Sport and Corporate Environmentalism" (*International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 1998), and books such as *Inside the Olympic Industry: Power, Politics and Activism* (2000) and *The Best Olympics Ever?: Social Impacts of Sydney 2000* (2002). In this latest book, Lenskyj focuses on two aspects of the industry: the uncritical media coverage of the Olympics, particularly in relation to the bidding process and preparations by the host cities, and the Olympic educational/promotional materials used by schools, which indoctrinate children into the "Olympic family," thereby securing an audience for future Olympic games.

After providing a framework for the book in Chapter 1, Lenskyj focuses Part I "Olympic Impacts and Community Resistance" (chapters 2-4) on how the bidding and hosting process for an Olympic games results in systematic threats to rights and freedoms, under the guise of making a city a more viable, "world class" host and, subsequently, providing a safe experience for tourists/fans. Using evidence from both pro- and anti-Olympic groups and local media coverage, Lenskyj demonstrates the (self) censorship of the local, regional, and national media regarding the games; the private profiteering by politicians, developers, and corporations using the public funding of Olympic venues; and the criminalization of protests/protestors and homelessness. In particular, the author uses several recent bid and host cities/countries as case studies of her arguments, in which she outlines the tactics used, successfully and unsuccessfully, by the Olympic industry. Additionally, Lenskyj astutely examines the resistance to these abuses, noting successes and failures.

Part I of the book provides ample evidence of the human rights abuses and profiteering in cities that bid for and/or host the Olympic industry. As Lenskyj adeptly points out, it is often difficult to engage in meaningful, public criticism (including within the academy) of the Olympics due to the powerful image management apparatus in place to protect the Olympic brand. As such, this portion of this book is particularly useful for anyone interested in the process and corporatization of the Olympic industry as it relates to bid and host cities/countries. Importantly, Lenskyj also gives voice to those who work to resist the Olympic industry machine – a group often omitted from media coverage in bid and host cities/countries.

In Part II "Olympic Education" (chapters 5-8), Lenskyj examines the often overlooked connection between the Olympics and the educational system within bid and host cities/countries. Focusing on the use of Olympic industry and corporate sponsor-produced materials in schools, the Olympic athlete as role model phenomenon, and the use of nude or semi-nude calendars for promotional/fundraising purposes by Olympic athletes, Lenskyj explores the production of ongoing adoration of the Olympics. Additionally, Lenskyj briefly touches on how cities/countries use school children in promotional materials and as ambassadors in bidding and hosting process.

In this section of the book, Lenskyj provides an interesting overview of the relationship between sport and education. Unfortunately, the Olympic industry is less central in the analysis than in the previous section. With her discussion of nudity and sport, Lenskyj, again, provides an interesting overview of the issues. However, what makes this issue one that is explicitly related to the Olympics, and not simply sports more broadly, is not fully articulated. Additionally, resistance to the Olympic industry educational apparatus is only tangentially discussed.

Lenskyj notes in the introduction that she is taking a radical, rather than a liberal, feminist approach in her critique; she is advocating for a transformation, rather than reformation of the Olympic industry. Unfortunately, resistance to and transformation of the Olympic industry are not elaborated upon by Lenskyj. From a radical feminist perspective, it is not simply enough to critique, but one must also suggest ways to bring about transformation for the reader to envision the author's goal. However, it is only in the last chapter (the shortest) in which a suggestion is made for

transformation of the Olympic industry - and it could be easily argued that the suggestions made by the author are reformative, rather than transformative. The title of the book suggests more emphasis on resistance, which is a smaller portion of the book than one might assume. Further elaboration on Olympic industry resistance would have benefited the book greatly.

Lenskyj's book serves as a brief overview of the Olympic industry machine and its influence and indoctrination in regard to bid and host cities/countries; one could easily use a chapter or two as a case study or introduction to issues for undergraduate students in a variety of disciplines/courses, including sports studies, sociology, peace/resistance studies, anthropology, and education. However, one would need to look elsewhere for a more in-depth analysis of resistance to the Olympic industry.

*Allison Harthcock, Butler University, Department of Media Arts,  
aharthco@butler.edu*

---

Allison Harthcock, "Olympic Industry Resistance: Challenging Olympic Power and Propaganda." *thirdspace* 9/2 (2010).