

Case Studies in Jazz and Boxing for the General Education Curriculum

Prepared for DeVry University
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Rationale

In social sciences and the humanities, case studies are a very effective instructional approach, especially in a technical context such as DeVry University where many subjects appear rather “dry” to the student. Case studies may translate theory into practice, and through analogy and exploration provide a more concrete understanding to what students are learning in general studies courses. What follows is a catalogue of case studies and resources that come from jazz and boxing areas of interest, which can be used across the general studies DeVry curriculum to illustrate various topics and themes found in student texts.

Disclaimer: The author of this guide does not pretend to hold the academic gospel about what works or does not work in teaching humanities or social science courses to a more technology-inclined student body. However the methods used in the courses I have taught in the last five years, including case studies, have often times saved me from losing my students in subjects where the correlation between the students necessary skills and the material covered in class is often misunderstood. Many students do not realize that although technology has changed drastically the way we interact at home and at work, i.e., interface communication vs. remote communication, we have to interact even more with people we do not know. This increase in the need for interpersonal communication is due to the nature of our society, that is growing urbanization, with more of a “Gesellschaft”(impersonal) type of interaction, and to the nature of our economy, that is post industrial, based on information technology and services. These occupations necessitate the future professional to expand one’s social circle, and to learn skills of interaction in a growing multicultural context. Yet, it seems that the importance of these precious skills is not well understood by the student nor taught as effectively if case studies are not used by the instructor. After all, most of the courses included in the General Education curriculum focus on the study of what makes us Human Beings: How we think, how we write, how we talk, how and why we use technology, how the past, culture, and society shape us, how we communicate, how we interact, how we solve problems, how we form groups, communities and societies, etc.

For this reason, it seems that theory, especially in social science introductory courses, has to be used carefully, especially for courses that are not part of the students’ technical major. Applied theory can work of course, yet is more fitting a subject for graduate students.

It is also important to consider the particular student population to whom we teach, and to whom we have to adapt our teaching style; an issue that is not stressed enough especially

in teaching seminars or conferences. Whatever method works in an introductory sociology course at Case Western in Cleveland, or at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie may not work here at DeVry, where student demographics may differ drastically. There are curricula standards on what students are supposed to know after completing a particular course, but methods to achieve this goal are much harder to standardize across campuses in the United-States. Therefore, teaching effectiveness has to be considered or evaluated in its own context, geographically and demographically. Here at DeVry where many students have and will become first generation college graduates, instructors may have to adapt their teaching style to a population of students who for many start with rather modest cognitive skills, and rather “marginal” interactive knowledge. Moreover, many students still think of DeVry as another technological institute, where all what one needs to learn to find employment is a specialized technical skill in a specific technical area. Many do not understand the need to develop other skills and knowledge that will make them more desirable and accomplished professionals, and many do not realize that DeVry is now a fully accredited University, for which upon completion of their particular baccalaureate degree, they can go on to apply for graduate schools. Therefore, in this context, often times the Humanities or Social Science instructor carries the burdensome responsibility to grasp and retain students’ interest in these subjects.

To exacerbate these challenges, some of the subjects covered in Sociology courses such as religion, race and ethnicity, gender, politics, etc. are often considered not only un-sensational but taboo by a student population that has been socialized by high school curricula to shun these “peace disturbing” status quos. A direct “in your face” approach to cover these topics in order to meet course requirements will not work very well in this context. What seem to work well in my classes, however, are more detoured approaches to discuss the more sensitive issues. For instance, the documentary titled “Jack Johnson: Breaking Barriers” on the first African American to be afforded a chance at the World Heavyweight Championship title explores the different road blocks minorities have experienced and still do experience in our societies. This topic may be regarded by students as the epitome of the issue no one wants to talk about, let alone explore. Many fear offending their neighbors when discussing the issue, while others complain it makes the innocent look bad. Yet presented through the lens of a case study, this issue inspires other reactions. Not only is this black and white early 1900’s footage documentary a big hit to my students, because of Jack Johnson’s social accomplishments, interesting life, boxing prowess, or impressive physique, it is a vehicle using a frame work (boxing) which many enjoy watching, and that exposes them to issues of race, ethnicity, social integration and social injustice, and gender to name a few, in a less direct and more humane way than bringing up these topics without context. In this case, we have displaced the focus of our study on race and ethnicity slightly without losing it, by incorporating a less austere, more sensational (some would say gruesome) component, which is boxing, the people’s sport. Yet we have accomplished the same goal, which is to explore issues of race, ethnicities, social barriers, etc. Jack Johnson was Black. Blacks could not get a crack at the title. They had to stay where they were and know their place. Had they won, as Jack did, they would challenge the establishment and throw off the social fabric, as Jack did. Riots followed after Jack Johnson defeated the Great White Hope, “betrayed of his race” James Jeffries, who had to come out of retirement to “wipe

this golden smile out of Jack Johnson's face". When students hear this in quote words from the narrator in the video, they react, but in favor of social and racial justice.

This aforementioned example about boxing demonstrates the effectiveness of using case studies when teaching such issues. It is important to notice that boxing is a very effective and appropriate vehicle to be used in most general education courses, from literature, where fictional writings on boxing are extremely prolific, to psychology, critical thinking, sociology, and history. To illustrate this point, Vassar College has recently incorporated in their American Culture Program a course titled "Reading the fights: Boxing and American Values". In that course, the study of boxing is used as a tool to explore other social aspects and areas of academic studies. Topics using boxing an academic vehicle include Aesthetics, Violence and Masculinity: Multidisciplinary Approaches, Boxing and Society: Issues of Race, Class, and Gender; Social Mobility: Myth or Reality, to only name a few.

Needless to say, the study of boxing and society is still recent, while the science of pugilism predates Greek antiquity. Therefore more scholarship is to be expected in this area to analyze various socio-cultural issues through the magnifying lens of boxing.

The same teaching approach can be used with America's original popular music, jazz. Many case studies may be borrowed from this field to be used in the classroom. Once again the humanities and social sciences will benefit from this vehicle. As an example, for many semesters I have had the opportunity to fit jazz in the many courses offered by the General education department. One particular course, *HUMN 303: Introduction to the Humanities*, allowed me to focus on the socio-cultural factors contributing to the emergence of jazz and jazz drumming in this country, and the cultural influences contributing to its stylistic evolution. Many subjects presented in this lecture pertain to the topics discussed in this course: History, Culture and Society, Film, Art and Literature. The vehicle used in this context is the drum set, instrument that most students can relate to through today's popular cultural icons (rock, heavy metal, hip-hop, disco, techno stars etc.). This tool will help the students establish easy connections between the drums and other academic subjects. Indeed, the mere study of the history of the drum set is a history course in itself that brings us as far back as the dawn of humanity.

The study of the influences contributing to the physical and stylistic development of the instrument may as well be a sociology course or an American culture course with an accented ethnic component. For instance, how could a place like New Orleans trigger the development of the instrument? Who lived in New Orleans at the time? How would this ethnic diversity influence to development of the instrument? Why were there African slaves in New Orleans, and what is their contribution to the drum set? What about Europeans? What were the French doing in New Orleans? What is the correlation between Napoleon military drum music, and jazz? Etc., etc.

We see through these examples, that such case studies are little windows to explore many subjects presented in that particular Humanities course and other courses as well. The

course *Sociology 185: Culture and Society* addresses many socio-ethnic issues where jazz as a case study (using the aforementioned tool) would be very appropriate.

The introductory course *Coll 147: Critical Thinking* could also incorporate the drum set and the rhythm section as vehicles to discuss issues pertaining to team work: everybody in a rhythm section does its part, drums, piano, bass, and guitar, and has to work together to support the rest of the band, just as a team project has to work well together to benefit the rest of the company. In both situations, all have to give their fair share, learn to solve different challenges, and improve communication between members of the band/organization. Thus, the class can explore through drums the following questions and ideas for discussion: How do band members work out their technical or interpersonal problems, how do corporate members approach conflict resolution? How do all resolve operational blocks, with their instrument or on a research project environment? What qualities do we seek most amongst band members, or in a team context? To play the drum set one needs good coordination between the different limbs, just as do team workers to successfully implement any project. A successful drummer needs to practice regularly, plan rehearsal, and concerts and be well organized and somewhat disciplined if she/he wants to remain on top. When practicing, repetition is necessary in order to internalize new material. All members need to come to the rehearsal prepared to make for a rewarding session. The same principles hold true for any other worker whose level of proficiency directly impact on the whole operation.

The tools used for these case studies are very extensive. Excerpts from books, articles from magazines, film, acting on classroom podiums and even technology can all be effective tools. A phonograph can be a formidable tool to analyze the importance of technology on the propagation of trends. The phonograph helped popularize jazz music in the United-States when this technology was first introduced, and reinforced different cultural identities, while contributing to the development of other styles of jazz and genres. That issue of cultural identity is addressed in the course *HUMN 432: Technology, Culture, and Society*, which explores how technology affected various social groups. Specifically one might ask how music, transmitted through the phonograph, the radio, and TV affected African Americans, for instance.

As mentioned earlier, literature on jazz and boxing is rather prolific. Although some students seem a little reactionary when it comes to English composition, in a context more familiar to them, such as sports (boxing) or music (jazz), the student may be able to relate more to the material to be learnt, and become more enthusiastic about the course. Because they can relate to these topics, students may try harder, and broaden their horizons, write better, become a more proficient communicators, and therefore optimize their professional skills. Because so much has been written about jazz and boxing, much of this literary material seems fitting as case studies to be used across the general studies curriculum. Many videos and documentaries would be appropriate resources as well, along with presentations from guest lecturers.

Proposed below are some examples of and references for case studies, and how they could fit in a given general education course. Please keep in mind that the format

proposed below is just a guide. This list of references and case studies is by no means meant to be exhaustive.

JAZZ RELATED CASE STUDIES :

Subject: History of jazz drums, and the different ethnic influences contributing to the evolution of this instrument

Format: Lecture/guest lecturer

Resource: Drum set, and History of Jazz Drums Clinician (Nicolas Abramowicz)

Course in which case study can be used:

HUMN 303: Introduction to the Humanities

Arts, music, history, American Culture, and film are discussed.

HUMN 410: Contemporary American History

A case study can pertain to the jazz age, the roaring 20's, American history and world influence on American society.

HUMN 417: Emergence of the Modern Era

Can use a case study relating to drums and warfare, cultural diffusion, music and social transformation and trends.

HUMN 450: 20th Century Fine Arts

Since one of the course foci is on music and its relation to historical development, the aforementioned lecture is definitely appropriate.

SOCS 185: Culture and Society and *SOCS 190: Cultural Anthropology*

Jazz as a reflection of American society: cultural diversity, unique cultural favor, and various ethnic influences contributing to this music's development.

COLL 147: Critical Thinking

Drum set and rhythm section: Teamwork to the benefit of all party involved.

Ethnic influence and jazz drumming evolution: dealing with a multicultural environment within the music, (learning on how to get along with different ethnic rhythm patterns, or at the work place with workers from different backgrounds) Use case study to address how to deal with mental blocks with rhythms, or at work and in school.

ENGL 232: Professional Communication

Collaborative communication, and oral communication are metaphors for musical communication in jazz music.

Subject: Jazz rhythm section in a band/Team interaction and communication at work and in school

Format: Lecture

Resource: Music CD titled, *Count Basie, All American Rhythm Section, with Walter Page, Freddie Green, and Jo Jones*

Course in which case study can be used:

COLL 147: Critical Thinking

This course emphasizes the importance of team effort skills in an academic or work environment; problem solving skills, and communicative skills, that is the necessity of listening to other team members can be exemplified by using a jazz rhythm section as case study; the tighter the section, the better the band. The tighter the team, the more effective and productive it becomes in a business environment.

HUMN 303: *Introduction to the Humanities*,
HUMN 410: *Contemporary American History*, and
SOC 185: *Culture and Society*,

A review of jazz, jazz instrumentation, and stylistic influence and development as seen in that rhythm section mirrors changes in American Culture and Society. For instance, the Kansas City beat with accents on 2 and 4 as opposed to 4 to the bar in Chicago, New York, and New Orleans. These are different styles reflecting different points of view in four cities at a given time of contemporary American History

Additional Resources: Excerpts from books on jazz can be used also as case studies in the classroom, and to be studied in lecture or study group format:

Miles Davis and American Culture, by Gerald Early, Missouri Historical Society, Saint Louis, 2001. This text is a collection of writings by contributors from diverse backgrounds on Miles Davis, the famed jazz trumpet player, whose complex life and character can be seen as a metaphor for American culture and society.

HUMN 450, HUMN 428, HUMN 420, 410, and 303, ENGL 135, 216, 219, and 227, and SOC 185 courses could use such case studies, where history, culture, society, art and literature are important components of the curriculum.

Miles, The Autobiography by Miles Davis with Quincy Troupe, Simon & Shuster, New York, 1989; a look at America, social stratification, integration, racism, gender and jazz through Miles Davis' lenses.

HUMN 428, HUMN 420, HUMN 410, HUMN 303, ENGL 110, 135, 220, 227, and SOC 185 could use excerpts of this resource as case studies.

Jazz Is, by Nat Hentoff, Limelight Editions, New York, 1984

And

Reading Jazz, A Gathering of Autobiography, Reportage, and Criticism from 1919 to Now, edited by Robert Gottlieb, Pantheon Books, New York, 1996.

Both texts are great resources for the same aforementioned courses, a literary material but also as historical and sociological points of reference to be used in the classroom.

For a closer look at American History and American Culture through the jazz lenses, subjects that are covered extensively in the Humanities and Social Sciences, we highly recommend the following texts:

Jazz, New Perspectives on the History of Jazz by Twelve of the World's Foremost Jazz Critics and Scholars by Nat Hentoff/ Albert J. McCarthy, Da Capo, New York, 1975.

This book is a must read for any scholar or people interested in understanding the social context contributing to the emergence of jazz in the United States, and to a unique American cultural and social phenomenon, or product.

The following texts are also classic literary pieces among scholars, and are used on many campuses in diverse curricula, from music to history, to sociology, anthropology, and English departments throughout the United States:

Early Jazz, Its Roots and Musical Development by Gunther Schuller, Oxford University Press, New York, 1968.

Satchmo, My Life in New Orleans by Louis Armstrong, Da Capo Press, New York, 1954.

The Jazz Years, Ear witness to an Era by Leonard Feather, Da Capo Press, New York, 1987.

I also recommend a series of short film and documentaries on jazz to be used as case studies also in the Humanities and Social Science courses:

Jazz Classics, A Division of Amvest Video,
937, E Hazelwood Ave. Rahway, NJ 07065

Is there really something new under the sun? Rap and hip hop dancers, Britney Spears or Madonna and company may learn more than a few good moves out of some of these 1930's tap or jazz dancers featured in this videos. History lectures pertaining to popular culture and trend diffusion or sociology courses could utilize these valuable resources.

The Last of the Blue Devils, The Movie About Kansas City Jazz, Rhapsody Films, 1979. This is a film about jazz and social trends, the Pendergast era, prohibition and about the different artists emerging from that important period in contemporary American history and music.

Documentary/life story on music CD: *The Memoirs of Willie The Lion Smith*, Koch-BMG Jazz, 2001. The great jazz pianist talks, sings, and plays, while recalling the pre-WWI era to the “rocking Harlem nightclubs of the 1930's”.

BOXING RELATED CASE STUDIES :

Subject: *Boxing: Jack Johnson, Breaking Barriers*

Format and resource: Video presentation

Reference: 1970, The Big Fights Inc., MPI Home Video

Courses in which case study can be used:

HUMN 410: Contemporary American History

This is about slavery and prejudice in the 1920's, how J. Johnson defies the white establishment, has 5 marriages (3 white women), violates the Mann Act of 1910, becomes a spy for the U.S. off the coast of Spain during WWI, befriends Tsar Nicolas II and his advisor Rasputine, etc.

SOCS 185: Culture and Society

Use this video to ask what are the social barriers J. Johnson broke? Race, ethnicity, gender, social stratification can be discussed using this particular framework.

COLL 147: Critical Thinking

Excerpts from the video can be used to review conflict management strategies.

Subject: Boxing in literature

Format: Short stories

Reference: *In the Ring: A Treasury of Boxing Stories*; Ed. By Martin H. Greenberg, Bonanza Books, New York, 1986.

20 stories by Ernest Hemingway, Jack London, Larry Sterling, Arthur Conan Doyle, Joyce Carol Oates, Budd Shullberg, etc.

Courses in which these case studies can be used:

Many scholars use boxing as a metaphor in their field of study. With this subjects used as case studies, the possibilities are endless, and rather exciting, even for those who despise the sport.

All ENGL composition classes (110, 135), ENGL 219 (Journalism) ENGL 220H (Creative Writing).

HUMN 428: Dramatic Literature

HUMN 445: Principles of Ethics

Topics: boxing, business, violence and ethics

PSY 110: Psychology

Topics: violence, aggression, boxing, catharsis, and psychology

COLL 147: Critical Thinking

Topics: boxing, conflict management skills, team work

SOC 185: Culture and Society

Topics: Ethnicity, race, social class, gender, social mobility

Additional Resources: Many other texts on boxing can be used as case studies in the classroom and are also fitting to these aforementioned courses especially English Composition courses.

A Neutral Corner, Boxing Essays by A.J. Liebling. Ed. By Fred Warner and James Barbour, North Point Press, San Francisco, 1990

The Fight by Norman Mailer, Vintage Books, New York, 1997

Sparring with Hemingway, And Other Legends of the Fight Game by Budd Schulberg, Ivan R. Dee, Chicago, 1995

Excerpt from *Prose Models*, Eighth Edition, by Gerald Levin, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990

Norman Cousins's Essay on *Who Killed Benny Paret?* is a must read for ENGL Composition students, and in other courses addressing the various and controversial aspects of boxing.

Writers' Fighters and other Sweet Scientists by John Shullian, Universal Press Syndicate Company, Kansas City, New York, 1983. A valuable text to be used especially for ENG 219-220H courses, (Creative Writing and Journalism)

Quest for Excitement, Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process by Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, Basil Blackwell Ltd, London 1986

This last text includes many cases studies appropriate especially for SOC 185 courses, HUMN 410 and 417, COLL 147, and PSY 110, such as: *Leisure in the Spare Time Spectrum, The Genesis of Sport as a Sociological Problem, Essay on Sport and Violence, Social Bonding, and Violence in Sport, Sport as a Male Preserve.*

Violence in Sports by Don Atyeo, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, New York, 1979 Chapter 3 titled "Blood and Canvas" includes origins of Pugilism, and its role and impact on American society. The topics can be interesting case studies for SOC 185, PSY 110, and HUMN 410 courses.

Some books on boxing focus on the historical and contextual circumstances in which this sport evolved. A lot can be drawn from the following works to be used as a framework in the Humanities and Social Science courses, sociology and especially contemporary history since they are great historical references. For instance Jack Dempsey's Colorado days illustrate very well the post WWI days in the American West.

The Manly Art, Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America by Elliot J. Gorn, Cornell University Press, New York, 1986

Bare Fists, The History of Bare-Knuckle Prize-Fighting by Bob Mee, The Overlook Press, Woodstock and New York, 2001

John L. Sullivan and his America by Michael T. Isenberg, University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1994

Gentleman Jim Corbett, The Truth Behind a Boxing Legend, by Patrick Myler, Robson Books, London, 1998

A Flame of Pure Fire, Jack Dempsey and the Roaring '20s by Roger Kahn, Harcourt Brace, New York, 1999

When Dempsey fought Tunney, Heroes, Hokum, and Storytelling in the jazz Age, by Bruce J. Evensen, The University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, 1996

Kid Blackie, Jack Dempsey's Colorado Days by Toby Smith, Wayfinder Press, Ouray, 1987

The following material focuses especially on issues of racism, race, class, gender and boxing in American culture/society, which are issues covered in Social Sciences and the Humanities, especially sociology.

Jack Johnson by Sal Fradella, of the series "They Didn't Know It couldn't Be Done", Branden Publishing Company, 1990

Champion, Joe Louis, Black Hero in White America by Chris Mead, Penguin Books, New York, 1986

"And a Credit to His Race", The Hard Life and Times of Joseph Louis Barrow, a.k.a. Joe Louis by Gerald Astor, Saturday Review Press, New York, 1974

The Culture of Bruising: Essays on Prizefighting, Literature, and Modern American Culture by Gerald Early, The Ecco Press, Hopewell, 1994

Beyond the Ring, The Role of Boxing in American Society by Jeffrey T. Sammons, University of Illinois Press, Chicago 1990 (See especially pages 30-72 on "Racism and Reform" and "The Troubled Twenties")

On Boxing by Joyce Carol Oates, The Ecco Press, Hopewell, 1987

This text also includes some insightful essays on the cruel side of the sport, and on Mike Tyson in Particular.

Many films about boxing could be used in the aforementioned courses, including HUMN 422, Film and Literature, that also addresses issues of esthetics in the arts/movies:

Raging Bull, directed by Martin Scorsese, United Artists, 1980, is a film that portrays the life of boxing champion Jake La Motta, and where Robert De Niro who incarnates La Motta won the Best Actor Oscar for this cinematic Tour de Force.

The Harder They Fall, is a film based on the novel by Budd Shulberg that also features Humphrey Bogart. Aside from the esthetic and mystic aspect of this film noir, corruption, fixed fights, and the dirty sides of the “sweet science” are disclosed in this must see other cinematic chef d’oeuvre.

Somebody Out There Likes Me, directed by Robert Wise, MGM-Turner, 1956, with Paul Newman and Pier Angeli. This is the movie that made Paul Newman a star, so true is his performance in the role of Rocky Graziano, former Middleweight Champion of the World. Graziano fought his way up from a life of deviance and crime to become a legendary and inspiring champion.

Rocky, with Sylvester Stallone is probably the most popular of all boxing movies among the later generations. From rag to riches, from modest and somewhat deviant lifestyle, to do right people’s champion, the film themes have inspired many to try harder, and not to give up in some of the most depressed social conditions and environment. Race, gender, social stratification, and social mobility are issues worth exploring when watching this now classic movie.