

John Harris Coppinger
Professor Miles
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**Secularization by Americanization:
R.V. Borleske, Whitman College, and Muscular Christianity
(1882-1947)**

The early history of American higher education is one steeped with the ideals of the Christian tradition. The first American colleges served as seminaries, producing religious leaders for the steadily expanding nation. But by the Civil War things had begun to change, more frequently colleges became centered on the education of all citizens; still in this era the vast majority of the American colleges were religiously affiliated and those that were not “could be counted on one hand.”¹ At the dawn of the twentieth century, the American college landscape began to see a diminished level of religious affiliation, and by the century’s close had indeed become distinctly secular. This steep decline of religiosity on the American college campus was influenced by a number of distinct factors, however one particular detail stands out as key to this shift: the veneration of American identity over Christian identity. During the first half of the twentieth century, changing outlooks regarding the nature of morality and the importance of character helped give rise to a new American nationalism, one born from the belief in the inherent superiority of Americans, and, ironically, from the reverence of the very religious precepts it would eventually displace.

In seeking to understand the reasons behind this shift, one needs only to look at the Christian thought of the time, specifically the emergence and rapid expansion of so-called Muscular Christianity. This new doctrine, which had developed as a reactionary

¹ Higgs, Robert J. *God in the Stadium: Sports and Religion in America*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1995: p.36

response to what was seen as the feminine Christianity of the Victorian era, emphasized the improvement of the physical body as means for the building of Christian character and reinforcing moral fiber. As a result, Americans became more focused on sport and exercise as a means of self-improvement than ever before. The new significance of athletics on spiritual health in turn led to the adoption of physical education, and eventually athletic competition, into the American college, culminating with the advent and perpetuation of intercollegiate athletic competition. But rather than positively affecting the moral fiber of men and producing learned, fit, and pious Christians, intercollegiate athletics helped push the American system of higher education steadily further along the path to a secularization. Instead of instilling a strong set uniquely Christian principle, Muscular Christianity instead inspired young Americans with the strong principles of American nationalism; in effect college athletics resulted in the rise of previously unparalleled belief in national identity.

This secularization by Americanization occurred nationwide, beginning in the northeast of the country, at the old institutions of the Ivy League, before sweeping west across the nation. At Whitman College, today a small liberal arts college in Walla Walla, Washington, this trend can be easily traced from its early days and affiliation with the Congregationalist Church, until the dawn of the Cold War. During this period, Whitman College Athletics was presided over by Raymond Vincent Borleske, who, from 1915-1947, served as a Coach and graduate manager at the college, dedicating himself to the moral education of Whitman students. Borleske's influence on development of the college, as well as the greater Walla Walla community itself was almost immeasurable, as was regarded by many as perhaps the "the most noted person on campus" during his

tenure.² As the son of a poor, immigrant father, the young Borleske had faced many challenges, meeting each one head on with the same perseverance that he would one day hope to inspire in the hearts of his students, as he pursued what he like to call “the Dream of America.”³ Due in large part to his influence, one can tangibly grasp the shift towards a secular Americanism on the Whitman Campus.

The philosophies of Muscular Christianity came into being in the early nineteenth century, long before the development many of the sports recognized today. As early as 1817, prominent American educators such as Philip Lindsley, of Princeton, advocated for sport as an “outlet for youthful energy” in order to prevent youthful sin, a notion later known as “Catharsis Theory.”⁴ However the philosophical root of Muscular Christianity was can be traced to Victorian England, where “a growing perception that sport encouraged the health of the body and spirit”⁵ resulted in a “fascination with athletics, robust health, and manliness.”⁶ This doctrine of “sound mind and sound body” would soon cross the Atlantic resulting in fundamental changes to the established religion of the time.⁷

Once this ideology of *manliness* arrived in the United States it began to interact with what can only described as an American superiority complex. In an 1863 *New York Times* article, citing figures from Belgian statistician Adolphe Quetelet, one writer claimed that Americans were “superior in strength and capacity for labor” than all other

² G. Thomas, Edwards, and Kirkman William. Whitman College, “A Sketchy History of Whitman Football: Excitement and Controversy” lecture notes, Last modified October 18, 2008. Accessed December 3, 2013: p.5

³ Hewins, John M., Borleske: Never Far From Hope. Seattle: Superior Publishing Co., 1966: p33

⁴ Higgs, 46

⁵ Mrozak, Donald J. Sport and American Mentality, 1880-1910. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1983: p.18

⁶ Park, Roberta J., ‘Soldiers may Fall but Athletes Never!’: Sport as an Antidote to Nervous Diseases and National Decline in America, 1865–1905, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 29:6: p.797

⁷ Ibid

nations.⁸ This sentiment of American ascendancy was echoed by many American leaders of the era in the coming decades, including men like Henry Cabot Lodge and Theodore Roosevelt, demonstrating that the principles of Muscular Christianity, specifically the growing “cult of masculinity,” were ideally suited to the American religious landscape.⁹

Another factor leading to the development of a uniquely Americanized version of Muscular Christianity was the democratic nature of the republic itself. In England, Muscular Christianity served as a means to disenfranchise the lower classes, preventing them from competition by emphasizing the notion that the purity of sport, and therefore of its players. This oppression depended on the concept of the amateurism with excluded professionals, meaning anyone with a job of any kind, from athletic competition. Thus, the upper classes established a clear divider between rich and poor, between those who could afford to play without compensation and those who could not.¹⁰

While sport was a form of separatism in England, Americans embraced what can be called a democratized form of athletic competition. The nation’s physical educators turned away from individual athletics in favor of team sports, such as the originally American games of baseball and football, in order to seek out “social value.”¹¹ In 1911 Albert Spalding, an American businessman and one of baseball’s leading proponents, stated that “the genius of our institutions is democratic; Base Ball is a democratic game,” emphasizing that in America sport was open to all classes.¹² Football would too prove to be a democratic game, as it was a game played in any condition, helping to develop an

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Mrozak 34, Park 797

¹⁰ French, Peter A. *Ethics and College Sports: Ethics, Sports, and the University*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004: p.11-16

¹¹ Mrozak 33, 38

¹² Mrozak, 108

“esprit de corps” between players as they battled the elements as well as their opponents; this willingness to brave the elements has often been equated with the myth of the rugged frontiersman, further strengthening nationalist mythology around the game.¹³ Once on American soil, it was clear Muscular Christianity took on a distinctly American character, spurring the development of distinctly American games, which continued to develop into the twentieth century.

For schools like Whitman College— small, privately endowed institutions— sports such as baseball and football offered much in the way distinction. By fielding athletic teams, especially successful teams, these schools could gain notoriety, and in turn generate larger donations. It was for this reason that Whitman College President Stephen Penrose journeyed to Spokane, WA, in the summer of 1906. Now in his twelfth year as head of the college, Penrose had saved the school from financial ruin, and was now committed to “lift the school out of its athletic doldrums.”¹⁴ Penrose himself was an advocate of sport as a means of developing character, echoing Whitman Tennis legend and fellow educator Professor Walter A. Bratton’s assertion that athletics helped to instill “strongest types of courage, honesty and manliness” in its participants.¹⁵ Indeed Penrose was convinced that a strong athletic program was “vital to building a college’s personality.”¹⁶ His goal was to find himself a star athlete, one with the brains to succeed in the academy and the skill to succeed on the field; his target was Vincent Borleske, a graduate of Spokane High School, and first year student at Blair Business College.

¹³ Ibid, 171

¹⁴ Hewins, 20

¹⁵ G. Thomas Edwards, *The Triumph of Tradition; Tradition in a Turbulent Age 1859-1924*; Whitman College, Walla Walla, 1993: p.204

¹⁶ Hewins, 20

The third child and youngest son of a Herman Borleske, a German immigrant who had fled his homeland to avoid conscription into Bismarck's Iron Army, and his American wife, Nina Evans, young Raymond Vincent Borleske, known to all as Vince, had lived an arduous life. The Borleske's were poor, a fact humorously emphasized by the fact that "Borleske" was actually a bastardization of the family's ancestral name, "Lesky," the result of a practical joke by a man Herman had met on his voyage to America, who had convinced him that it was good to associate the word "poor" with his name. At the time, Herman spoke no English, and upon arrival at Ellis Island he repeatedly referred to himself as "poor Lesky," causing the immigration official who processed him to register his name as "Borleske."¹⁷ Herman, however, was not perturbed by this, as he was grateful that America had taken him in, and cherished the virtues of freedom and hope he felt exemplified his new home, an appreciation which he passed on to children, instilling in them the same "love of everything American" he himself possessed.¹⁸

Enduring harsh winters, long days of work and the loss of several siblings to the diseases of the frontier, young Vincent Borleske built himself into quite a young man; in high school he excelled on the field and in the classroom.¹⁹ Despite being considered undersized at 5'8", he was a tenacious player "who threw [a baseball] like a bullet" and ran on legs "on a set of legs that would make a fire hydrant blush," accelerating his 170 pound frame and making tackling him "like grabbing a double arm of meat grinders."²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid, 13

¹⁸ Ibid, 92

¹⁹ Ibid, 13

²⁰ Ibid, 22, 17, 22

In 1905 he graduated as the valedictorian of his class and was determined to attend law school once he could afford it.²¹ In terms of athletic skill and scholastic intelligence, he was exactly what President Penrose was after. Indeed following a meeting with the young man Penrose was convinced he was he would lead the Whitman College Missionaries to athletic glory; and after some convincing– in which Penrose offered that “We are not rich Whitman either– except in opportunity”– young Vince agreed to enroll for the fall semester and to work as a tutor in mathematics in order to pay for room and board.²² This was the beginning of a friendship that would last until President Penrose’s death in 1947, one that would shape the future of Whitman College.

Once on the Whitman College campus in the fall of 1906, the young Borleske went on the attack, fully immersing himself into life in Walla Walla. In the fall he played football and in the spring he played baseball. Various eligibility rulings had left the two programs with small, unimpressive rosters, but Vince was didn’t care, and he soon became the de facto captain of the football team.²³ In the summers he would go off to Sandpoint, Idaho, to play summer baseball, where his talents attracted the gaze of big league scouts, but Vince was not interested in a professional career and returned to Whitman after each summer.²⁴ His junior year, 1908, the increasingly mature Borleske was elected President of his class, and along with several friends started the movement to bring fraternities to the Whitman Campus.²⁵ In late October of that he led the Missionaries to perhaps their greatest gridiron victory, a 30-6 defeat of the much larger University of Idaho; one local sports page boldly proclaimed “Borleske Almost Alone

²¹ Ibid, 18

²² Ibid 23

²³ Ibid, 54

²⁴ Ibid, 58

²⁵ Ibid, 52, 56

Beat Idaho,” and when asked about the game a member of the Idaho Coaching staff replied “Gee... that Borleske is a Hell of a football team!”²⁶ By the time he graduated in the spring of 1910, Vincent Borleske had become known as one of the Northwest’s best athletes, and after his senior season was named to Walter Camp’s “All America football team,” become one of the first players from the “uncivilized west” to earn that honor.²⁷ Though he left campus upon accepting his diploma, and headed off to Oregon to pursue his law degree, the relationship between the now grown up Borleske was far from over.

The man who had coached the Whitman College athletic teams during the best years Borleske’s college career was Fred Applegate. He, like Borleske, had been recruited by President Penrose to help steer the Missionary Varsity squads in the right direction. During his tenure as head coach of football, basketball, and baseball, Applegate also served as the athletic director of the YMCA, helping to build a strong bond between the institutions.²⁸ Indeed the bond between which formed between Applegate and Borleske, then his star player, instilled the younger man with a deep respect for the YMCA; and later in life, Borleske would become one of the Walla Walla YMCA’s biggest fundraisers, reportedly single handedly meeting funding goals.²⁹

This relationship Applegate and the YMCA is incredibly important in understanding the formative years of Raymond Vincent Borleske. The “Y,” as many affectionately knew it, was very much a bastion of Muscular Christianity. Within the walls of local YMCA buildings, one could attend a bible study, take a swim, or hit the gym, thereby attending to the spiritual needs of both the mind and body: it was the

²⁶ Ibid, 60-61

²⁷ Ibid, 66

²⁸ Ibid, 52

²⁹ Ibid, 112

perfect marriage between Christianity and sport. However on a national level, the American YMCA served as a decidedly nationalistic organization, which promoted American virtue alongside Christian virtue. This notion is seen primarily in the organization's efforts to Americanize immigrants in the years before the First World War; a time when many agreed the "nation's institutions were under assault" by what was seen as a constant stream of inferior peoples.³⁰ Many advocates of Muscular Christianity were incredibly vocal regarding the danger of "hyphenated-Americans," including, with Theodore Roosevelt, perhaps the creed's most famous advocate, stating that the "uplifting of mankind" depended on the "the supremacy" of American values.³¹ The resulting cultural anxiety drove the YMCA to endeavor to assimilate these newcomers into American society, thereby helping to elevate them. The YMCA was so adept at this job that U.S. Department of Immigration reported that participants in the Y's programs were imbued with the "Christian idea of Americanism [to go along] along with their citizenship papers."³² This sort of rhetoric, though likely much more comprehensive than anything he would encounter in Walla Walla, did mesh with many of the values instilled by Borleske's own Americanized, immigrant father. Thereby, in seeking to understand R.V. Borleske's influence on Whitman College, one must understand the national YMCA and what it stood for.

After graduating from Whitman, Borleske headed west to Seattle, where he attended law school at the University of Washington, coached football and baseball at Broadway High School and taught mathematics. In summers he played semi-professional

³⁰ McBride, Paul. "Peter Roberts and the YMCA Americanization Program 1907-World War I." *Pennsylvania History*. no. 2 (1977): p145

³¹ Higgs, 121

³² *Ibid*, 160

baseball in the Western Canada League, before retiring from baseball for good after the 1912 season.³³ Circumstances would then conspire to send him south to Portland, Oregon, where he would finish his law degree at University of Oregon. The students of Broadway High were sad to see the man they called their “idol” go, and one newspaper commented that Borleske was “recognized by near all of the students and teachers as Broadway’s most prominent citizen,” a sentiment that would foreshadow his eventual popularity on the Whitman campus.³⁴ In Portland he again taught math and coached athletics, this time at Lincoln High School. Soon after arriving in the city, he married Mignon Kay, whom he had met whilst working in Seattle and whom he affectionately referred to as “Tweetie,” this was the beginning a long marriage that would last forty-four years.³⁵

In 1914, he graduated from Oregon with his law degree and passed the bar exams with ease; but, much to his disappointment he Borleske was unable to start up a law practice due to lack of funds. But that disappointment would soon fade as opportunity came knocking in the form an offer from his dear friend, and father figure, Stephen Penrose.³⁶

In the five years that had passed since Borleske’s graduation, Whitman athletics had been suffering, and the football program had won just three games after his departure.³⁷ Coach Applegate had resigned his coaching position for all sports except basketball, and his replacement, Archie Hahn, had failed to attract significant interest

³³ Hewins, 68

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Hewins, 74-75

³⁶ Ibid, 82-83

³⁷ Ankeny, Levi. "A Saga of Football Stars at Whitman." Great Northwest Magazine, Fall 1963, The Borleske Papers. Walla Walla, WA: Whitman College Northwest Archives, accessed November 2013

from students who were “more interested debate and campus politics... and girls,” and was leaving the school.³⁸ Penrose was desperate to right the ship, and he knew that Raymond Vincent Borleske was just the man he needed for this undertaking. Borleske, a man described as being “sentimental, opinionated, loyal and generous,” knew that accepting Penrose’s offer would further delay his career in law, but felt a great debt towards Penrose, and consented to return to Whitman as head coach and graduate manager; he would pay back the debt he felt he owed Penrose and the college itself³⁹

When he arrived on campus in the fall of 1915, Borleske intended to stay for a few years, before departing to begin his law career.⁴⁰ However this plan never came to fruition, as Borleske’s enthusiasm for coaching and love for the students of Whitman made it impossible for him to bring himself to leave, remaining the head of Whitman athletics for thirty-two years until his dismissal in 1947. His first act as head coach was to take “his athletes into the mountains for a pre-season program of muscle building,” a maneuver affectionately remembered as “Camp Borleske,” demonstrating a renewed dedication to sport in the college.⁴¹ Borleske also instituted a new form of intramural competition designed to stimulate interest in athletics and increase the number of men participating on Varsity teams. Teams would receive extra points for every varsity athlete on the team, and more points still for featuring a player who joined a varsity team; each intramural team competed in all intramural sports, and at the end of the year, the team with the most cumulative points was proclaimed champion.⁴² Using his influence in the

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Edwards, 452

⁴⁰ Hewins, 83

⁴¹ Ibid, 85

⁴² 1939-1940 Intramural Constitution, The Borleske Papers. Walla Walla, WA: Whitman College Northwest Archives, accessed November 2013

Greek community, he convinced all four of Whitman's fraternities to field teams, which were always fully manned due to fraternal pride, or, more often, fraternal pressure.⁴³ It is estimated that this program helped to put almost eighty percent of the males on campus into a varsity uniform in its first few seasons of implementation, which was all but required in order to field competitive teams against schools with student bodies usually often three or more times larger than Whitman's.⁴⁴ Things were looking up for Whitman athletics with Coach R.V. Borleske running the show, but events in Europe would conspire to bring his plan to a screeching halt.

America's entry into the First World War devastated Whitman College, bringing the school closer than ever to closing, as enrollment dipped well below average, and the demands of the Army Training Corp taking up much of the male student body's free time.⁴⁵ Despite this, Borleske managed to scrape together a football team in 1917 and play an abbreviated schedule, but, like most of the other Missionary teams, it was simply not possible to compete against larger, better-equipped institutions during wartime. Athletics were reluctantly cancelled in 1918, and Borleske enlisted in the Army, earning the rank of Second Lieutenant, before being assigned to Camp Pike in Arkansas as a physical education instructor.⁴⁶

During the First World War, the Army was a breeding ground for the ideals of Muscular Christianity, specifically a militantly nationalist version that had been evolving in the Reserve Officer's Training Corps (ROTC) on campuses across the country and in the American service academies at Annapolis and West Point. A new "rhetoric of war,

⁴³ Hewins, 94

⁴⁴ Edwards and Kirkman, 5

⁴⁵ Hewins, 90

⁴⁶ Hewins, 91 and An abbreviated Whitman Football History, The Borleske Papers. Walla Walla, WA: Whitman College Northwest Archives, accessed November 2013

sports, Christianity and patriotism” flowed forth from these institutions, creating a system that both indoctrinated its recruits with the ideals of American superiority and imbued them with an almost fanatical loyalty to God and the Flag.⁴⁷ The pre-war ideal of “Christian, athlete, scholar” was replaced with the new ideal of the “Christian Soldier,” embodied by the ‘doughboy;’ indeed the religious “campground” of previous generations had been replaced by “military exercises on the parade ground and athletic field” as the primary means of creating good Christians.⁴⁸

It was into this maelstrom of masculinity and war that Borleske was thrown, when he arrived at Camp Pike. Impressed with his talents for the game of football and his coaching track record the Army had decided that he would be just the man to “put [the] muscles on doughboys.”⁴⁹ The Army’s decision to place men like R.V. Borleske in such roles was largely due to the work of men like Dr. Morton H. Prince, a pioneer in the study of dissociative psychological disorders, such as shell shock and other trauma-induced afflictions, who had asserted that football “so well prepared physically and mentally” they would feel “no shock and terror” on the battlefield.⁵⁰ Thusly, the Army chose to use football as a means to ready their new recruits for the horrors of war.⁵¹ This however proved to be problematic, as Dr. Prince himself had become quite taken with the ideals of Muscular Christianity and was an avid fan of intercollegiate football, rendering him unwilling to consider “any contradictory evidence” regarding the benefit of football;

⁴⁷ Higgs, 96

⁴⁸ Higgs, 40, 96

⁴⁹ Hewins, 91

⁵⁰ Park, 805

⁵¹ Ibid

only after the war's end, did the nation realize that nothing could have ever prepared men for the obscenity of trench warfare, certainly not football.⁵²

Second Lieutenant R. V. Borleske was of course spared an overseas assignment, and spent much of the war doing the same thing he had done before the war: coach football, albeit with much more control his players. As part of his duty, Borleske was able to schedule exhibition games against Tulane University, in which he too also competed.⁵³ His brother Stan, who had briefly attended Whitman before transferring to Michigan, did however spend fourteen months overseas as a Captain in the army engineers, as did many other members of the Whitman community; many would not come back, including one of Whitman's greatest football players, the man who succeeded Borleske as the star of the Missionary backfield, Royal "Tubby" Niles, who had contracted and passed away from tuberculosis after being dosed with mustard gas at the front.⁵⁴ All in all three hundred and forty-eight members of the Whitman community, including students, graduates, staff, and professors, were involved in the American war effort in some way.⁵⁵

After receiving his honorable discharge on Christmas Eve 1918, Borleske rushed back to Walla Walla to be reunited with his wife, Mignon.⁵⁶ When he returned to his post at Whitman College, he discovered a very different school than he had left; the influenza epidemic had made its way through town the previous autumn, turning much of campus into the equivalent of a hospital, at least one hundred and thirty-eight students were still involved in the military and away from campus, and the school's finances were failing

⁵² Ibid, 806

⁵³ Hewins, 91

⁵⁴ Ibid, 53 and Gregg, Will. "Bridge as Past and Present: Whitman, World War I and the Gift of the Class of 1908." Whitman College: Fifty Plus News. no. Winter (2013): p.5

⁵⁵ Gregg, 3

⁵⁶ Order for Honorable Discharge, Camp Pike, December 24, 1918, The Borleske Papers. Walla Walla, WA: Whitman College Northwest Archives, accessed November 2013

once again.⁵⁷ The remaining student body featured only thirty total men, making it difficult for Borleske to form any sort of varsity team, but he made due, cobbling together teams and schedules for basketball and baseball.⁵⁸ The overall attitude on Campus towards the war was decided positive however, as the majority of the student body felt that the “experience of war as a moral boon” for the men who fought, and, as Edward Mason, a graduate of the class of 1908 and 1918 graduation speaker put it, Whitman’s role was to provide “men of the kind the war needs.”⁵⁹ Indeed the college echoed the national sentiment of “portraying the war as a great struggle for democracy” fought by the “forces of righteousness” against an enemy bent on destroying the very values America was built on; all in all reflecting the values of the new Muscular Christianity.⁶⁰

The war had transformed the very fabric of the nation; America was now a world power, as many leading Muscular Christians, men such as Teddy Roosevelt, had desired. The nationalist, Muscular Christian rhetoric of the pre-war era had now become an institutionalized through military training, and had emerged finally as the dominant form of ideology in the United States. From the original ideal of “sound mind and sound body,” Muscular Christianity had evolved to a new ideal, that of the “literal body of Christ,” strong, fit, and athletic, but most importantly, American.⁶¹

1919 proved to be an important year for Borleske, as part of his charge as graduate manager of the college was to oversee a campaign to raise new funds for a new women’s dormitory, a task he took too with great enthusiasm, easily raising the desired amount. Described as a serial “belonger,” Borleske yearned to be a “part of everything

⁵⁷ Hewins, 91, Gregg, 3, Hewins, 93

⁵⁸ Hewins, 91

⁵⁹ Gregg, 4

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Mrozak, 209

the country could offer,” and so had had over the years become a member of the Elk Club, the American Legion, the YMCA, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Congregational Church.⁶² Thus he spend much of the summer touring around the northwest delivering popular speeches on the “meaning of Americanism,” or the “value of athletics,” blending the values of Americanism with the rhetoric of Muscular Christianity; often he would scold select audiences when he felt that their communities had be “lax in meeting obligations to country, school, or city.”⁶³ As he traveled across the region he exposed his thoughts on the ideals of the nation, the war, and morality in general, encouraging mothers to enroll their sons in YMCA programs to keep them away from vice, and admonishing Walla Walla residents who failed to see the value of the college beyond the entertainment of football.⁶⁴

When it came time for football season, Borleske again cobbled together a team from severely limited pool of students, despite the loss of many pre-war athletes who had either perished or defected to larger schools.⁶⁵ Even in the face of adversity Borleske never surrendered. For him giving up on football would be a rejection of the American values he loved and the ultimate disrespect to the young men he coached. In their annual game against the University of Washington, the Missionaries trailed by a score of 87-0 at half; when asked if he’d like to cut the game short, Borleske replied in the negative, resulting in a demoralizing 120-0 loss which became known as the “Whitman Massacre.” When asked why he continued to send his team back out onto the field, he responded, “Whitman does not quit,” a declaration which would become the athletic department’s

⁶² Hewins, 92

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Ibid,

⁶⁵ Ibid, 93

mantra for the rest of his tenure.⁶⁶ Only the basketball team was exempt from the struggles of Whitman athletics, thanks in large part to Borleske's former coach and YMCA head Fred Applegate, who had built a built Walla Walla's "basketball talent from the infant up," churning out dozens of YMCA trained basketball stars, many of whom chose to attend Whitman.⁶⁷

The dawn of the 1920's brought a steep decline in religious life on college campuses across America. In 1920 thirty-nine percent of all male students enrolled in an institution of higher learning were affiliated with the YMCA, a number that steadily declined throughout the decade.⁶⁸ The Y itself conducted a study to verify this trend and found that from 1920 to 1928 the number of students who stated that they "had no interest in religion" had more than doubled from six percent to twenty, while those who had responded that religion was "essential" to their lives had dropped from thirty-five percent to twenty percent.⁶⁹ Suddenly it appeared that the YMCA, a bastion of Muscular Christianity, had been so successful at exposing its principles that it had inadvertently secularized large portions of the youth it had hoped to Christianize, a trend that was certainly aided by the organization's own Americanization efforts. In its purest form the YMCA served as "a transitional institution between the evangelical piety of the 1870s and the growing secularism of the early twentieth century," with the slow nationalization of its core principles serving as driving force for this change.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Ibid, 94

⁶⁷ Ibid, 94-95

⁶⁸ Setran, David P. "Student Religious Life in the 'Era of Secularization:' The Intercollegiate YMCA, 1877-1940." *History of Higher Education Annual* (2001) 21: p.10

⁶⁹ Ibid, 23

⁷⁰ Ibid, 37

The secularization of this period was felt on the Whitman campus in the changed rhetoric surrounding athletics. No longer was the goal of sport to mold character and build moral fiber, instead Borleske sought to demonstrate physical pain can be endured and “need not be feared;” rather than focusing on the purity of the soul that could be achieved through athletics he instilled the knowledge that “a hurt will go away” in order to prepare his students to “meet, accept, and conquer the mental stresses of later life.”⁷¹ This new attitude also allowed for the inclusion of women into the field of college athletics, through the founding of a women’s intramural committee.⁷² As religion began to fade from campus, so too did the notion that sport was a “manly” pursuit, eliminating the “virtual exclusion” of women from athletics.⁷³ Borleske embraced this change wholeheartedly, increasing his popularity on campus exponentially as student groups called from his appointment to the position of “Dean of Women,” a post he would occupy wholeheartedly.⁷⁴

Fears that a decline in religion would result in a decline in academic scholarship in the American college, specifically among athletes, were clearly dismissed on the Whitman Campus as Borleske continued to insist “on scholastic excellence” from his players.⁷⁵ In fact, during this same period, 1920-1928, Whitman College athletes had virtually the same grade point average as non-athletes, often remained on campus longer than regular students, and even graduated at a rate near twice that of other students; a fact

⁷¹ Hewins, 98

⁷² Women’s Intramural Constitution, circa 1935, Athletic Department Records, Walla Walla, WA: Whitman College Northwest Archives, accessed November 2013

⁷³ Higgs, 150

⁷⁴ Letter by Whitman Students Requesting Appointment of Coach Borleske as Dean of Women, The Borleske Papers. Walla Walla, WA: Whitman College Northwest Archives, accessed November 2013

⁷⁵ “College Athletes Long or Short on Brains.” *The Oregonian*, Sunday edition, sec. Sports Editorial, April 22, 1928. Athletic Department Records, Walla Walla, WA: Whitman College Northwest Archives, accessed November 2013

that emphasized the value of the civic values that Borleske communicated to his charges.⁷⁶

The rest of the decade also saw great changes in the system of college athletics. It had become painfully apparent that larger, publicly funded universities would always have a competitive advantage over smaller, private colleges. Big schools only got bigger as the country grew, while small schools stayed small, Whitman College, of course, was the latter. The growing divide in talent level resulted in a decline in the quality of football games, as big simply trounced small. Ironically, it was the big schools who decided that the arrangement was no longer palatable, and moved on, leaving Whitman and other smaller schools to reorganize their athletic alignment.⁷⁷ Thus the latter part of the decade saw a renaissance of Whitman football and baseball, as Whitman played more conference games against comparably sized schools. In the new Northwest Conference, Whitman College was an eminently successful program, winning five conference titles for football from 1921-1931, seven for basketball, and an astounding ten baseball titles during Borleske's tenure.⁷⁸ The year 1931 was perhaps the college's finest athletic year ever, as the Missionaries took home titles in four sports.⁷⁹ However perhaps the most famous moment of this era came in 1935, when Borleske's Missionaries defeated the Idaho Vandals, a team that outmanned and outsized them by an average of fifteen pounds per player, for the first time since his own playing days.⁸⁰ These were indeed the glory years of Borleske's tenure, and it was during this era that Borleske would look to inspire his

⁷⁶ Report on Scholarship and Athletics, 1928. Athletic Department Records, Walla Walla, WA: Whitman College Northwest Archives, accessed November 201

⁷⁷ Hewins, 107-108

⁷⁸ Hewins 109, R.V. Borleske Silver Jubilee Pamphlet 1941, , The Borleske Papers. Walla Walla, WA: Whitman College Northwest Archives, accessed November 2013

⁷⁹ Abbreviated Whitman Football History – Borleske Papers

⁸⁰ Ibid

team with demonstrative pep talks that often culminated in an emotional appeal for his players to “cherish the 'Dream of America.'”⁸¹ He would frequently remind his players to remind his player “be thankful [for] the opportunity to work and play in this wonderful land,” believing that “to be an American was man’s greatest privilege.”⁸² Despite being an described as an “unshakable conservative,” Borleske believed that this privilege was to be extended to all those lucky enough to live in the United States, including people of color⁸³

Whitman’s athletic success lasted for a few years more after 1935, as the thirties drew to a close so did the college’s fortunes. In 1940 the college celebrated Coach Borleske’s twenty-fifth year of service to the college, and he was showered with praise and congratulations from across the country, with Whitman graduate and future Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas stating that he had “toughened the moral fibre of a generation of men.”⁸⁴ The Whitman community dearly loved their old Coach, yet the signs that the end of his tenure was drawing nearer had become apparent. His dear friend Penrose had retired in 1934, leaving behind a college with a sterling academic reputation, but also nearly two million dollars in debt; furthermore, Penrose had held the college together by relying on the loyalty of men like R.V. Borleske, who in turn relied on his loyalty for their own livelihood, with Penrose gone, that assurance too was gone.⁸⁵ As the years went by, Borleske began spending more time away from the college, dedicating his efforts in other community organizations, such as the Walla Walla Rotarians and the

⁸¹ Mitchell Jr., Sherm. "Not Only A Coach, But Also---." Walla Walla Union Bulletin, 1957. The Borleske Papers. Walla Walla, WA: Whitman College Northwest Archives, accessed November 2013

⁸² Newspaper Clippings, circa 1957, The Borleske Papers. Walla Walla, WA: Whitman College Northwest Archives, accessed November 201 and Hewins, 127

⁸³ Newspaper Clippings circa 1957 – Borleske Papers

⁸⁴ Hewins, 129

⁸⁵ Ibid, 118

city's Chamber of Commerce; he also became increasingly dedicated to civic-mindedness and the politics of the time, even stating that was "not afraid of Stalin," only "the degeneration of the American home."⁸⁶

America's entry into the Second World War sealed the old Coach's fate, as the wartime disruption of student activity hit the campus hard, destroying its ability to compete athletically, resulting in abbreviated seasons in 1942-1944, and the cancellation of athletics in 1945.⁸⁷ In 1946, Borleske coached his final season of football at the college, leading a team of fourteen men, including nine former service members, to a lackluster 2-5 record.⁸⁸ This disappointing result, coupled with the death of President Penrose in March of 1947, decidedly Borleske's strongest supporter, conspired to end his time at the college.⁸⁹ After the 1946-1947 school year, Borleske's thirty-two year long appointment as head coach and graduate manager was not renewed.⁹⁰

Over the course of his tenure at Whitman College, Raymond Vincent Borleske presided over the athletic program's greatest period of sustained success. He had inherited a messy, unimposing program, and despite the upheaval brought on by the First World War, had helped it prosper. Under his watchful eye and influence the doctrine of Muscular Christianity had been nurtured through to its natural end, leading the college down the road to secularization via Americanization. A "possessor of muscular abilities along with tender yet firm convictions," Borleske had "through his ability, his ideals, [and] his sportsmanship, has gained the respect and admiration of all true lovers of sport,"

⁸⁶ Ibid, 127

⁸⁷ An abbreviated Whitman Football History – Borleske Papers

⁸⁸ 1946 Football Roster, The Borleske Papers. Walla Walla, WA: Whitman College Northwest Archives, accessed November 2013 and An abbreviated Whitman Football History – Borleske Papers

⁸⁹ Hewins, 136

⁹⁰ Ibid, 139

helping to shape the community around him.⁹¹ He was so beloved by the youth of Walla Walla that they would often venture to knock on his door and invite him to play baseball with them, an undertaking he relished, even on holidays.⁹²

In his later years, Borleske would become Mayor of Walla Walla, serving for two terms and enjoying with near universal approval from community, with his love of the ideals of America and his dedication to the town's citizenry made him a fine leader.⁹³ After leaving office he also helped to revitalize the Marcus Whitman Hotel, creating a new cultural center for the city, eventually even hosting President Eisenhower on a visit to the region.⁹⁴ After a long successful life, Raymond Vincent Borleske passed away at the age of sixty-nine in early January 1957; he and Mignon had no children of their own, but Borleske had immeasurably contributed to education and growth of multiple generations of Whitman students and Walla Walla youth.⁹⁵

The development Muscular Christianity in America did indeed have a distinctly secularizing effect on the nation. The development of the rhetoric of 'manliness' and the virtue of sport inevitably mixed with the ideas of American superiority, resulting a corruption of the movement's original principles and the creation of an Americanized version of the creed. This new version was practiced across the country on the campuses in the form of intramural and intercollegiate athletics, before merging with the more radically nationalistic Muscular Christianity that had developed in the service academies during the First World War. This culminated with the explosion of a militantly Christian nationalism, which over the course of the next twenty years slowly cooled into a more

⁹¹ Sherm and Newspaper Clippings circa 1957 – Borleske Papers

⁹² Newspaper Clippings circa 1957 – Borleske Papers

⁹³ Hewins, 140, 144

⁹⁴ Hewins, 151

⁹⁵ Sherm

conservative Americanism, focused on civic improvement over imperial supremacy. Which in turn, demonstrates a separation from the evangelism that marked the previous era of American society. This effect can easily be seen on the Whitman College campus during the tenure of Raymond Vincent Borleske, who, whether his teams won or lost, always “continued to hold the confidence of a whole community—students and faculty, college and town.”⁹⁶ His intense patriotism, coupled with his belief that sport had the power to shape better Americans, as well as his affiliation with the YMCA and years of civic service, helped guide the college along a path towards Americanization and eventually secularization.

⁹⁶ R.V. Borleske Silver Jubilee Pamphlet 1941