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Eric Reed, *Selling the Yellow Jersey: the Tour de France in the Global Era*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015. viii + 251 pp. Appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. \$45.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-226-20653-0.

Review by Robert W. Lewis, California State University Polytechnic, Pomona.

Anyone who has spent time in France during the month of July can attest to the visibility and importance of the Tour de France. A three-week bicycle race, the Tour is widely regarded as the most difficult sporting competition in the world, where its riders fight the headwinds of northern France and grind their way over the challenging climbs of the Pyrenees and Alps. As one watches French television commentators waxing rhapsodic during broadcasts of the Tour about the history of a particular chateau or a small town in an Alpine valley, too, it is obvious that the race has become inextricably linked to notions of French culture, geography and identity.<sup>[1]</sup> But as Eric Reed demonstrates in his compelling new monograph, *Selling the Yellow Jersey: The Tour de France in the Global Era*, the Tour has never been exclusively about sport, social and cultural identity or picturesque French landscapes. Tracing the history of the Tour as a commercial sporting spectacle, Reed argues that the Tour fostered a form of globalization that exported French characteristics, values, and organizational practices to the world at large. At home, he argues, the Tour ushered in a particular sort of commercial modernity, from the role of print media in shaping the spectacle, to the increasing influence of commercial sponsors and the role of celebrity athletes as endorsers and businessmen. At the same time, the Tour indelibly stamped the global sport of cycling and the practices associated with it. Moreover, it provided a conduit for local communities in France to negotiate their relationship with the broader national and commercial world. Reed's work, in short, challenges historians to consider the history of sport as not only integral to the shaping of modern consumer society in France, but also as a key pathway by which the relationship between France and the rest of the world was shaped and developed.

*Selling the Yellow Jersey* methodically traces the evolution of the Tour as a global sporting spectacle, beginning with its genesis in 1903. In the decades after the Tour was conceived, Reed argues, it became the most important European professional cycling event, the "prime point of exchange" and connection between French cycling and sport in the broader world (p. 23). From its inception, the Tour was driven by what Hugh Dauncey has called the "sport-media-industrial complex," or the nexus of print media, bicycle manufacturers and sporting associations that came to be dominated by French interests.<sup>[2]</sup> As Reed argues, the commercial character of the Tour substantially shifted in 1930, when race organizer Henri Desgrange changed the race format to feature "national" teams (as opposed to ones sponsored by bicycle manufacturers). In order to fund the race, Desgrange relied heavily on subsidies from local cities that hosted stages of the Tour, and created a "publicity caravan" that drew in corporate sponsors from beyond the bicycling world. And even in the era before the Second World War, the Tour had a global reach; newspapers in America, New Zealand, and Australia all reported on the race, and described its particular commercial and French qualities, thus creating communities of readers that followed it virtually from thousands of miles away.

In the years after 1945, the Tour transformed as a commercial spectacle, reluctantly but successfully embraced television broadcasting, and globalized even more overtly. Reed deftly demonstrates how the

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media landscape in the early years of French television (where commercial advertising was forbidden) encouraged corporate sponsors to flock to the Tour as a movable billboard to place their products in front of viewers. Under pressure, race organizer Jacques Goddet changed the race organization in 1962 to feature teams funded by corporate sponsors; these new partners, however, were now largely *extra-sportifs*, or companies outside the world of cycling, like British Petroleum or Bic. At the same time, Goddet was transforming the race's management and financial base to facilitate standardized schedules and television broadcasting. In this regard, Reed considers the Tour as a modernizing, technocratic enterprise akin to others in postwar France. By the late 1970s, too, the non-traditional sponsors who flocked to the Tour (like the bank *Crédit Lyonnais*) came to see sport as a powerful form of promotion; Reed contends that the Tour, by this point, was the "cornerstone of a media sporting empire that controlled a significant portion of the money private corporations gave to sport in France" (p. 81). The final chapter in the Tour's ongoing modernization and globalization, Reed argues, came after the deregulation of the television landscape in the mid-1980s, when the Tour not only navigated the new infusion of cash from TV rights fees, but positioned itself logistically at the heart of global cycling. The Tour attracted new international sponsors like Coca-Cola, recruited competitors from beyond the Western European core, and promoted its business interests abroad, from its contributions to American stage races in the late 1980s and early 1990s, to its creation of and partnership with new global races like the Tour of Qatar or the Amgen Tour of California.

If the Tour functioned as a French form of global commercial culture, its riders became celebrity commercial pitchmen and embodied what Reed terms the "French School" of cycling—a system of values and a model of rider development and competitions capped by the Tour (p. 83). As early as the 1930s, advertisers and race sponsors relied on the star appeal of famous French Tour riders to sell bicycles, alcohol and cigarettes. In the postwar era, the marketing power of celebrity cyclists increased. Reed identifies Jacques Anquetil, a French star who won the Tour five times between 1957 and 1964, as the prototypical "businessman" athlete whose overt embrace of the pecuniary benefits of racing troubled some French commentators. Nonetheless, Reed argues that the "French School" endured even when the sport globalized even more dramatically, as evidenced by the overall victories of American Greg LeMond in the 1980s and his compatriot Lance Armstrong every year between 1999 and 2006 (triumphs that have since been voided as a result of revelations about his systematic use of performance-enhancing drugs). Reed contends that these victories by outsiders to the Western European cycling core paradoxically strengthened the "French School," in the sense that winning the Tour and racing in France remained the consecration of those cyclists' careers. Reed also suggests that despite the challenges posed by doping to the Tour's long-term survival, the "French School" has been revitalized in recent years through the very public efforts made by the Tour de France and French teams to combat drug use in cycling.

For all of the attention that *Selling the Yellow Jersey* devotes to the Tour as a global force, it also makes a strong case for the local dimensions of this cultural and commercial globalization. Reed examines Brest and Pau, two small cities that have hosted the end of Tour stages or the beginning of the race on multiple occasions from 1906 to the present. Reed argues that these small cities used the Tour to not only redefine their identities in a new cultural and commercial context, but to re-forge relationships with the broader world. Along the way, they shaped the evolution of the Tour as a global spectacle (p. 111). In the case of Brest, local officials and businessmen embraced the Tour as an opportunity to participate in the cultural and commercial life of France and Europe as a whole. City officials looked to the 1952 Tour—which began in Brest—as a chance to showcase Brest's recovery from World War II, while an ambitious local businessman named Alexis Gouvenec tried to capitalize on the 1974 Tour's start in Brittany to promote his own enterprises (namely a ferry between Roscoff and Plymouth in Great Britain) and the region at large. In Pau, for its part, the city initially embraced the Tour after 1930 as a chance to boost its flagging tourist industry. As the city's economy diversified by the 1970s, however, the Tour was incorporated into the local sporting identity as a cherished cultural ritual of the summer.

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*Selling the Yellow Jersey* thus offers an invaluable assessment of the Tour de France as a commercial spectacle that propagated a French-inflected form of globalization. In this regard, it is a vital addition to the historiography of the Tour, which has largely concentrated on the Tour's wider cultural and social meaning within France itself, but has not substantially explored the Tour as either a commercial or truly global phenomenon. But as Reed demonstrates, the Tour's commercial nature was not ancillary to the racing; its mercantile qualities framed the way the event was experienced by French men and women, as well as by others beyond French frontiers. Sport, in this light, was a crucial conduit of consumer modernity in France, one that forced the French to confront real ambivalences about what mass consumer society might entail. As an immensely popular television spectacle, the Tour not only facilitated the evolution of television broadcasting, but also became the channel by which businesses entered the French home in unprecedented ways. Reed's analysis of the organizational transformations of the Tour, too, is fascinating; by unraveling the labyrinthine details of the Tour's financial history, he not only demonstrates the tremendous economic influence of the Tour and its parent corporations in France, but makes the case that the Tour itself deserves to be considered alongside other modernizing enterprises of the *Trente Glorieuses*.

Reed's argument about the Tour's global character, for its part, offers a valuable model for understanding globalization, in terms of its content, timing and orientation. First, it suggests that sport—so often considered within bounded national histories—was from the late nineteenth century onward a globalizing force. Even a sport like cycling, which did not thrive outside of Western Europe for most of the twentieth century, had a global reach well before the 1980s. This also suggests, too, that commercial and cultural globalization were ongoing processes that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, and were not exclusively confined to the years after the Second World War. Moreover, Reed offers a timely reminder that globalization and “Americanization” were not always synonymous; in this sense, the Tour (like haute cuisine or avant-garde cinema) was an international product that shaped global norms while still reflecting French roots. Finally, Reed's chapter on the Tour's relationship to Brest and Pau offers another, crucial perspective on the relationship between the local and the global. While it is probably too strong to claim that local communities really “shaped” the Tour, Reed is certainly convincing in suggesting that the local was indeed the framework through which many people directly experienced the national or global.

*Selling the Yellow Jersey's* analysis is richly detailed and well supported by a wide array of original sources, ranging from Australian newspapers to oral interviews with French race officials and corporate executives. In a few places, however, the analysis might well have been expanded. In its treatment of the Tour as a global phenomenon, *Selling the Yellow Jersey* largely concentrates on the relationship between France and the Anglophone world, particularly the United States and Great Britain. This is understandable, for reasons of clarity and access to sources, but the book would be enriched if it acknowledged the links between the Tour and other global locales (particularly Latin America) in more detail. The focus on the Anglophone world also leads the book to devote less attention to the influence of the Tour de France in Europe itself; one suspects that from the point of view of Belgians, Italians or Spaniards, the Tour and the model of cycling culture that it propagated were important, but coexisted alongside other local organizational and cultural forces that might have mattered more for racers, companies and spectators alike. Reed's book also raises important and sometimes unanswered questions about the role of the celebrity cyclist as both commercial pitchman and cultural ambassador. It would be fascinating, for instance, to see how cycling celebrities rated as endorsers in France in comparison to other athletes and to film stars from the 1950s onward. In terms of celebrity cyclists, too, the book might well give a bit more attention to the most recent global cycling superstar, Lance Armstrong. *Selling the Yellow Jersey* moves very quickly from Armstrong's first Tour win in 1999 to his fall from grace after 2009. Given the steady drip of revelations about drug use during the Armstrong years, it makes sense that the book does not want to rehash the Armstrong story in too much detail. But as a dramatic manifestation of the influence of American cyclists, corporations and management practices on

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the race, Armstrong's place in a global and commercial history of the Tour deserves a bit more space than it gets here. Devoting more attention to Armstrong's career would actually help Reed tease out the challenges to the French model posed by the new global cycling era, and would also further explore the ways the Tour validated and transformed Armstrong himself.

Overall, *Selling the Yellow Jersey* offers a compelling and long-overdue analysis of the Tour de France as a global commercial sporting spectacle. It showcases the importance of the history of this particular sporting event, both within French frontiers and beyond them. Moreover, it breaks new ground by convincingly demonstrating that the race was not only immensely potent as a source of cultural and social meaning for French men and women, but was central to a kind of commercial modernity—from the race's structure to its celebrity athletes—that shaped globalization on French terms.

## NOTES

[1] For the most comprehensive analysis of the cultural and social narratives surrounding the Tour, see Christopher Thompson, *The Tour de France: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

[2] Hugh Dauncey, *French Cycling: A Social and Cultural History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), p. 45.

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