

## Online Research Seminar

# Hollywood Sports Movies and the American Dream

Date: 17 February 2023, Friday

Time: 3:00pm - 4:00pm

Speaker: Dr. Grant Wiedenfeld



### Zoom link:

<https://lingnan.zoom.us/j/91612502104?pwd=OVFGUVpabmJPQ1VCamp5dVNXUzRCUT09>

## Summary

Grant Wiedenfeld's *Hollywood Sports Movies and the American Dream* (Oxford University Press, 2022) examines the democratic character of movies from *Rocky* (1976) to *Ali* (2001). Taking a civic republican approach rooted in the ideas of political philosopher Hannah Arendt and cultural sociologist Jeffrey Alexander, Wiedenfeld uncovers a surprising current of multiculturalism that traverses the Reagan era. Although the genre often evokes the image of a bootstrapping individual champion, these stories actually end in failure on the field and instead locate their happy ending in communal solidarity. J.D. Connor says, "For Wiedenfeld the sports movie is not merely a genre but a mode of civic participation, and this book amounts to the opening salvo of an Arendtian film criticism." The chapter on *Ali* in particular confronts the seeming paradox of the multicultural hero, who must be a model to emulate, a typical group representative, and a unique individual, all at once. By alternating montage and pure boxing action, Michael Mann heralds the singular importance of Muhammad Ali. Arendt's theory of public action articulates the subtle tension that distinguishes the heroic athlete.

## Speaker's bio

Grant Wiedenfeld studies esthetics and culture with one focus on U.S. cinema and another on modernist literature. He is Associate Professor of Media and Culture in the Department of Mass Communication at Sam Houston State University. He earned a PhD from Yale University in Comparative Literature and Film & Media Studies, where he also taught courses on sports and cinema in Yale's English Department and Film Studies Program. J.D. Connor called his book, *Hollywood Sports Movies and the American Dream* (Oxford University Press, 2022), "the opening salvo of an Arendtian film criticism" (referring to Hannah Arendt). His research on early cinema has appeared in the *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* and the *Wiley Companion to D.W. Griffith*. The journal *Flaubert* published his article on landscapes in *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, which relates to a book project on punctuation and whitespace in modernist literature.