

Beyond the Headlines: Olympic Politics -- Past & Present

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How does Sochi 2014 highlight historical parallels with politics and Olympic games?

By highlighting current Olympic topics that are being covered by US media, you can use a class or a course to trace geopolitical issues connected to sports

- International Olympic Committee (IOC) values and rules regulating the extent of political overlap with Olympic games
- Bid cities and the selection of host cities
 - *Host city structure and political background
 - *Security Issues
 - *Environmental Issues
- Humans Rights Issues
 - *Workers' Rights
 - *LGBT Rights



Local Environmental Rights

- IOC 1991 amendment to Olympic Charter
- Environment as third pillar of Olympic movement
- Issues: new construction's impact and location, harassment of environmentalist, possible exploitation of Caucasian leopard as symbol
- Withdrawal of World Wildlife Fund from partnership with Sochi Olympics



Security Issues

- Genesis of the security issues
- The Chechen Wars between 1994 and 2000
- Continued conflict in the North Caucasus
- Caucasian Emirate
- Historic Circassia, its peoples, and the Russian empire

*Sochi as a site of historical



Workers' Rights



- Migrant workers from: Armenia, Serbia
Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan
- Issues: abuse and exploitation, illegal withholding identity documents, long work hours, minimal to no pay, overcrowded housing and insufficient meals
- Russia National Law and International Law obligates Russia to protect workers' rights
- State Corporation Olympstroy: inspection of construction sites
- Business policy & procedures to protect workers' rights
- IOC failed to protect or look into workers' rights issues until late February 2014 in response to complaints about unpaid wages
- HRW has proposed reforms to the Olympic Charter

LGBT Rights



- June 2013 Anti- LGBT Laws:
 - *Ban of gay propaganda promoting gay lifestyle to minors
 - *Ban of same-sex couples from outside Russia adopting Russian children
- Russian officials make public statements about competing athletes
- International community responds: UN, Germany, France, US
- Corporate Response: At&t, Visa, McDonald's, Coca-Cola, Google
- Athlete Response in conjunction with IOC standards & Russian Law:
 - Principle 6: Discrimination of any kind is not part of Olympic Movement
 - Rule 50: Prohibits political demonstrations by competing athletes
- US Hypocrisy over LGBT laws

Part II: Historical Parallels

- Focus on historical and political events preceding and following the specific Olympic event
- Draw parallels between different Olympic events in a historical and political context
- Ask broader questions about the way this contributes to our overall understanding of sports and politics





Munich Olympic Games 1936

- Promoting the achievements of a country and a system are seen in past Olympics but these cases show far more leadership spectacles
- Campaign for Olympics adds to personal glory of Putin and Hitler
- Putin's actions as president focus on cash flow and elite dominance
- Hitler's political rise was capped off through his approval at games
- 1936 v. 2014:
 - *Same responses to international outcries
 - *Prominent political prisoners released before journalists arrived
 - *Response to Anti-Russian hysteria taken from organizer of Berlin games

Mexico City Olympic Games 1968

- Gestures by U.S. athletes Tommy Smith and John Carlos
 - *Political and social contexts
 - *The Olympic Project for Human Rights
- Reactions from the Olympic community
 - *Shows of solidarity
- Věra Čáslavská's silent protest
 - *Prague Spring
 - *Controversial judging decisions



Munich Olympic Games 1972

- Black September and the Munich Massacre
- Lack of proper security arrangements
- International terrorism and the mass media potential of Olympics
- Gold medal basketball game controversy
- Politicization of referees, FIBA, appeals panel



Denver Olympic Games 1976

- Wins IOC bid in 1970
- Initial environmental concerns - Mt. Sniktau and Evergreen community
- Changes by DOOC in response to initial environmental concerns
- Economic concerns surrounding taxpayer burden in Colorado
- Dick Lamm and Citizen's for Colorado's Future
- Contrast to Sochi and citizen's political opportunities in 1976 US vs. 2014 Russia



Lake Placid Winter Olympics 1980

- USA National team of amateur and college athletes defeats Soviet Union national team, undefeated in world and Olympic games since 1964
- Two political systems and ideological beliefs
- Soviet Aftermath: Minimal media coverage in USSR and major disappointment on their end
- Political implications that the Soviet System was worse than their opponents' systems
- US Aftermath: Nationalistic celebrations, respect, and excitement in the US. Continued discussions and political reflections of the game



1980/1984 Summer Olympic Games



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- 1980 summer games boycott initiated by the United States
 - *Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979
 - *President Carter's ultimatum
- 1984 Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc boycott of L.A. Olympics
 - *Soviet rationale
 - *Possibility of political retaliation?
- Were the boycotts a success?

Other Potential Cases & Discussion Questions

- 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games - Blood in the Water
- 2002 Salt Lake City Olympic Games - LGBT Rights
- 2008 Beijing Olympic Games - Security, Political, & Environmental Issues
- 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games - Security Issues

Discussion Questions:

- Why does Russia get all this attention and not other times in the past?
- How does US media portrayal impact common views of the Olympics games?
- Discuss the importance of images in understanding political debates
- What are the effects, if any, of Olympic boycotts on political issues?
- What's the IOC's institutional role in maintaining political influence on the Olympic games?

External Resources

Online Resources:

[Official Olympic Educator Resources Page](#)

[Educators Toolkit for Olympic Topics](#)

[Russian & Sochi Related HRW Publications](#)

[World Wildlife Fund- Mistakes of Sochi 2014](#)

[The Circassian Cultural Institute](#)

[ESPN 30 for 30 Short on 1972 Gold Medal Basketball Game](#)

[The 1968 Olympic Black Power Demonstration in Context](#)

Complete slides from this presentation can be found online at <http://cseees.unc.edu/>