

# Strong, Beautiful and Modern

## National Fitness in Britain, New Zealand, Australia and Canada, 1935–1960

By Charlotte Macdonald

Teacher Notes

History

### BOOK OVERVIEW

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, a wave of state-sponsored ‘national fitness’ programmes swept Britain and its former colonies. Following revelations of the Nazi enthusiasm for government-backed sports and the organisation of mass leisure, the programmes quickly foundered. They probably laid, however, the foundations for the twentieth century’s obsession with fitness – a key facet of modern life. Charlotte Macdonald shows how governments became convinced that they must encourage citizens to be healthier and more active, and how these efforts reinforced the cultural ties of the Empire. Alongside these state-sponsored efforts was a growing emphasis from business, the medical establishment and popular culture on the importance of having ‘a better body’. *Strong, Beautiful and Modern* explains the origins of the modern preoccupation with ‘the body’.

### KEY FEATURES

- Chapters cover national fitness movements in each of England and Scotland, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada. The final chapter draws together the thematic strands in a discussion.
- Illustrations include: photographs, posters, advertisements, and excerpts from illustrated publications.
- Concludes with abbreviations, a list of illustrations, endnotes, a bibliography, and an index.

### RELEVANT CURRICULUM/ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS

#### Achievement Standards

##### Level 3

AS91434 (3.1) Research an historical event or place of significance to New Zealanders, using primary and secondary sources (event includes an historical development or movement).

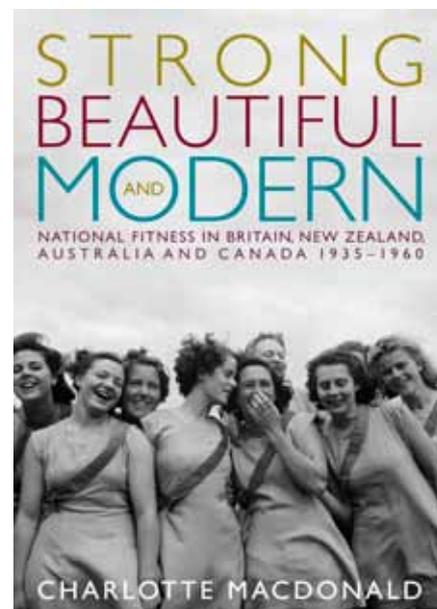
AS91435 (3.2) Analyse an historical event, or place of significance to New Zealanders.

AS91439 (3.6) Analyse a significant historical trend and the force(s) that influenced it.

### USING *STRONG, BEAUTIFUL AND MODERN* IN YOUR HISTORY PROGRAMME

3.1 *Strong, Beautiful and Modern* can be used:

- as a source of primary and secondary material for inquiry on twentieth-century New Zealand sport and fitness, women’s lives, health care, leisure activities



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charlotte Macdonald is Professor of History at Victoria University of Wellington. She has strong interests in women’s history, both in New Zealand and the wider British Empire, and in the history of sport.

Books in School Libraries

- for research – comparing trends and forces in different Commonwealth countries that influenced organised fitness
- to compare with programmes of fitness in Nazi Germany (e.g., League of German Maidens and Hitler Youth) or to look at connections to enthusiasm for eugenics.
- to investigate organisations like the Women’s Health and Beauty League, YWCA/YMCA, or Scouts, or events like the Olympic Games.

3.2 Use *Strong, Beautiful and Modern* and other sources to produce a researched essay on government programmes to develop physical and mental fitness in the years before and after WWII. Historical ideas could include public health, public leisure, organised sport, empire, modernity and colonisation. Other possible formats to present analysis on this theme: webpage, book chapter, notes for an illustrated speech.

3.6 Write an essay examining trends in government promotion of physical fitness in mid-twentieth century British Commonwealth focusing on the celebration of the body, patriotism, outdoor life, organised sport.

## INDEPENDENT ENQUIRY IDEAS

- Compare the British Commonwealth experience with that of fascist Europe.
- Analyse the imagery used in advertising campaigns (e.g., posters).
- Consider the extent British culture continued to influence New Zealand in the twentieth century.
- Analyse the relationship between sport and national pride. e.g. Olympics.
- Debate whether transnationalism is a meaningful concept (chapter 5); or if governments promoted fitness for personal or public benefit; or whether governments used sporting successes to strengthen their own position.
- Investigate whether there were similar movements in other Commonwealth countries (India, Ceylon, the West Indies).
- Compare ideas of masculinity and femininity in New Zealand society with other cultures.
- Use of oral histories to examine experience of New Zealanders.
- Analyse the impact of gender, class and ethnicity on participation in fitness programmes.
- Examine individual sports (rugby football, rugby league, cricket, marching) or the careers of athletes (e.g., Jack Lovelock, Yvette Williams).

## FURTHER READING

Sandra Coney, *Every Girl: A Social History of Women and the YWCA in Auckland 1885–1985*, Auckland YWCA, 1986

Sandra Coney, *Standing in the Sunshine: A New History of New Zealand Women since they Won the Vote*, Viking, 1993

Caroline Daley, *Leisure and Pleasure: Reshaping and Revealing the New Zealand Body 1900–1960*, Auckland University Press, 2003

Keith Sinclair, *A Destiny Apart New Zealand’s Search for National Identity*, Allen and Unwin/Port Nicholson Press, 1986 (particularly chapter ten)

■ BWB Publishing Trust would like to thank Carol Jarman for these teacher notes.

### The BWB Publishing Trust: Books in School Libraries

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