

The Ethics of Outrage: Online Hate, Historical Memory, and the Lineker Controversary [abstract only]

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The Ethics of Outrage: Online Hate, Historical Memory, and the Lineker Controversary

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Abstract

This paper examines the controversy surrounding Gary Lineker’s 2023 tweet criticising the UK government’s Illegal Migration Act and its comparison to ‘1930s Germany’. Situating this case within the mediated politics of historical memory and digital communication, the paper explores how sporting figures, as moral and symbolic actors, navigate the fraught terrain between institutional constraint and the virality of online outrage. In particular, the paper analyses how Lineker’s intervention catalysed waves of online hate, thus revealing how expressions of political dissent by athletes or broadcasters are often policed through moral condemnation and digital hostility. Drawing from theories of performativity and collective memory, the paper interprets Lineker’s tweet as a ‘performative rupture’: a moment in which liberal ideals of free speech, impartiality, and neutrality confronted their own contradictions. In this respect, while critics accused Lineker of trivialising the Holocaust, this analysis reframes Lineker’s act as an ethically disruptive gesture that reactivated the political urgency of historical remembrance to challenge contemporary injustice. Through a critical reading of social media discourse, the paper demonstrates how sport’s digital public sphere operates as a site where discrimination and moral outrage converge. In doing so, it contributes to wider debates on online hate and the ideological limits of liberal tolerance in the governance of sport.

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