

## Not Quite Ready for Prime Time: Baseball History, 1983-1993

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When it comes to baseball, there is no denying Ecclesiastes: "Of the making of many books there is no end." Whatever the place of the national pastime in the hearts and minds of America's sports fans, baseball remains the sport of choice of the nation's literati, continuing to attract more attention from creative writers, academics, and non-professional historians than any other sporting activity. In recent years, more than 350 books on baseball have been published annually, many of them works of "history."<sup>1</sup> Despite an abundance of baseball histories, the history of baseball remains remarkably obscure. The problem is not neglect, but just the opposite—a surfeit of certain kinds of histories that ignore major aspects of baseball's history as well as baseball's place in American history.

This survey of baseball historical writing from 1983 to 1993 is limited to books. Journal articles and unpublished theses and dissertations have been excluded partly because of space considerations, but primarily because they are, for the most part, either incomplete studies or preliminary reports of work in progress. The term "history" is troublesome. In an age of interdisciplinary studies, one can no longer tell a book by its cover *or* its content by the author's discipline. Considered, therefore, are books that are historical in approach and attempt to explain rather than simply document (e.g., chronologies and statistical compendia) baseball history. Although non-professionals continue to dominate the field, the focus is largely, but not exclusively, on the work of academic historians. Inclusion of books by non-professionals is limited to those works which are either primary contributions or particularly good examples of certain genre. The emphasis on academic writing reflects not only the principal audience of this journal, but also the belief that the future of baseball history turns on scholarly studies by trained historians augmenting the information-driven work of dedicated non-professionals. Finally, because the work of the last decade evidences no discernible topical, interpretive, or methodological patterns, the burden of the essay is an

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1. Richard Arpi, a member of the Bibliography Committee of the Society of American Baseball Research, has compiled annual listings of baseball books published since 1987. The number continues to grow steadily: 325 were published in 1989, 362 in 1992. For a convenient listing of selected titles published from 1991 to 1993, see *The Cooperstown Review: The Forum of Baseball Literary Opinion*, 1(1993), pp. 155-94.

assessment of needs and opportunities in baseball history. Thus my primary purpose is to survey the kinds of baseball history that have been written in recent years rather than to critique individual contributions; hopefully, the correlation of what has been done with what needs to be done will stimulate future research.

## I

Baseball history is no nascent genre. The half-century following the appearance of Albert G. Spalding's pioneering *America's National Game* (1911), the first true history of the game, saw no shortage of baseball histories. The period between World Wars I and II was the "Golden Age" of baseball history as the popularity of books chronicling the game's past paralleled the public's enthusiasm for the players on the field.<sup>2</sup> However, professional historians have only recently undertaken the research and writing of the game's past. The Founding Fathers of scholarly baseball history are Harold Seymour and David Q. Voigt. Seymour's *Baseball: The Early Years* (1960) was the first scholarly baseball book, and his two-volume study remains the most thoroughly researched and authoritative history of professional baseball from its amateur origins in the second quarter of the nineteenth century to the early 1930s. Seymour, a traditional narrative historian, wrote an institutional history of the game's organization and administration based upon a close and literal reading of texts, while Voigt, a professor of sociology, emphasized baseball culture and personalities in *American Baseball* (1966-1983), a three-volume survey of the game through the early 1980s.<sup>3</sup> By applying scholarly canon to a subject previously regarded as a non-serious aspect of popular culture, Seymour and Voigt simultaneously elevated the study of baseball history to new qualitative levels and made it attractive to academicians. Seymour and Voigt initiated the scholarly study of baseball history, but academic baseball history dates' from the appearance in 1980 of two complementary books that together cover the first 40 years of twentieth century: Steven Riess's, *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era* and Richard Crepeau's *Baseball: America's Diamond Mind, 1919-1941*.

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2. The standard baseball bibliography, despite conspicuous omissions and numerous errors in citations, is Myron J. Smith, *A Comprehensive Baseball Bibliography* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1986) and the supplement published in 1993, *Baseball: A Comprehensive Bibliography, Supplement 1* (1985-May 1992). Also valuable is Marion Fournier, Richard W. Stark, Jean-Michael Johnson, and Gilles Chiasson, eds., *The Baseball File: A Comprehensive Bibliography of America's National Pastime* (Gloucester, Ontario, CAN: Sport Information Resource Centre, 1992). Dated but still useful is Anton Grobani, *Guide to Baseball Literature* (Detroit Gale Research, 1975).

3. Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The Early Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960) and *Baseball: The Golden Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); David Quentin Voigt, *American Baseball*, 3 vols.: *From Gentleman's Sport to the Commissioner System* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), *From the Commissioners to Continental Expansion* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), and *From Postwar Expansion to the Electronic Age* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983). See also Voigt's collection of essays, *America Through Baseball* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1976).

Combining extensive archival research with sophisticated quantitative analysis, Riess studied professional baseball from 1900 to World War I, primarily in Chicago and New York but also in Atlanta, to determine the relationship between the rhetoric of baseball's propagandists and the experiences of players, owners, and fans. He discovered that the depiction of baseball as an "all-American game embodying all American virtues and values" was the prescriptive construct of a burgeoning baseball business geared to and supported by a native-born middle class. More than a sporting spectacle, the National Pastime was an agent of social mediation, for despite the "substantial disparity [that] existed between the ideology of baseball and the realities of the game . . . baseball operated as a means of describing and reinforcing the values that regulated behavior and goal achievement as well as determining suitable solutions to certain social problems." Whether analyzing the socioeconomic origins of ballplayers, the assimilation and acculturation of immigrants, the symbiotic connections between owners of ball clubs and politicians and gamblers, or the technological (transportation) and spatial (land acquisition) considerations in ballpark construction, Riess asks and answers fundamentally important questions about urban America as well as baseball in the early twentieth century. More a study of baseball during the Progressive Era than an examination of the relationship between baseball and Progressivism, *Touching Base*, the most ambitious and exhaustive case study of urban professional baseball yet written, clearly demonstrates not only the vast potential for understanding American history through baseball, but also the value of utilizing sociological theory and municipal archives in researching baseball history.

In contrast with Riess's empirical approach, Crepeau imaginatively examined the cultural images in popular periodical literature, chiefly *The Sporting News*, the self-styled "Bible of Baseball," to determine "what the people connected with [major league baseball] saw as important personal and national characteristics, beliefs, and values." Reminiscent of the pioneering cultural studies of Henry Nash Smith and John William Ward, Crepeau posits players as symbols of the age and baseball commentary and reportage as expressions of the ethos of the times. His use of players as personification of culture is both evocative and controversial, to wit the representation of baseball's (and America's) organizational transformation through the persona of Babe Ruth, a hedonistic nonconformist whose refusal "to be reshaped and become one of the faceless urban mass or made over into a company man" made him the "last gasp of the rugged individual" in a society "heading into the corporate anonymity of the twentieth century"; Dizzy Dean, "a transitional figure" who "played the role of the rugged individual but did so by exploiting the techniques of the emerging corporate society"; and Joe DiMaggio, "the colorless superstar par excellence" who, complete with

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4. Steven A. Riess, *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), p. 221.

“gray-flannel traveling uniform,” was the “perfect corporate player for the increasingly other-directed society.” On the other hand, Crepeau’s explanation of how “American cultural values and baseball were intertwined” during the 1920s and 1930s are variations on familiar themes—e.g., major league baseball “entered the Twenties preparing to defend standards, ethics, morals, patriotism and the remaining eternal verities” both as a reaction to the Black Sox Scandal of 1919 and an attempt to perpetuate “some of the rural values of the nineteenth century” amid the cultural transformation to an urban-industrial society. The seemingly commonplace analyses are actually profoundly instructive: Because the Lords of Baseball and their retinue of newspaper reporters viewed the National Pastime as the exemplar of traditional American values, their championing of democracy, nationalism, chauvanism, fair play and equal opportunity both reflected and reinforced the prevailing cultural ideologies. Unclear, however, is the extent to which formulaic preachments about baseball reflected the actual practices and beliefs of those who watched, played, and administered the game.<sup>5</sup>

With their brace of books, Crepeau and Riess fundamentally changed the course of historical writing about baseball. Whereas Seymour and Voigt applied scholarly canon to the writing of baseball history, Crepeau and Riess brought baseball into the academic discipline of history, viewing the game not as a discrete research subject, but as a means of investigating important non-sport issues in American society. Indeed, Crepeau emphatically denied writing a “baseball book.” “This is not a history of baseball,” he declared. “It is an attempt to look at one segment of American society as it saw itself and as it reflected the larger society.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Riess appropriately considered his work as part of the “new urban history,” for it provided original insights and information about socioeconomic class, immigration and ethnicity, social control and mobility, and political machinery. By approaching baseball as an integral part of, not an adjunct to, mainstream academic historical research, Crepeau and Riess effectively distinguished between “baseball history” (the annals of the game) and “the history of baseball” (the place of baseball in American history), a conceptual biformity that continues to the present day.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, their work argued by example that the latter, not the former,

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5. Richard C. Crepeau, *Baseball, America's Diamond Mind, 1919-1941* (Orlando, FL: University Preserves of Florida, 1980), pp. ix, 23, 48, 91, 94, 124-25, 142.

6. Crepeau, *Baseball: America's Diamond Mind*, p. xi.

7. The distinction is one of degree, not of kind. Academics have always placed their histories of baseball in the context of broader developments in American history. Indeed, Seymour took pains in his to describe his pioneering *Baseball: The Early Years* (p. v-vi) as “a history of baseball which describes the growth of the game in the perspective of American history)” and contended that “the history of baseball’s development is the story of nineteenth-century America in microcosm.” Further, he averred that while “the book gives attention to outstanding players and teams, playing record, and pennant winners, it subordinates these to the economic and social aspects of baseball and its development as a part of Americana.” In truth, he wrote narrowly about baseball, making only infrequent and largely offhand references to American history in general. Absent qualifications, the terms “baseball history” and “the history of baseball” are used interchangeably in this essay, partly for convenience but primarily because I believe, as will be discussed later, that the distinction ultimately is meaningless.

should be the concern of serious historians and presaged future research on baseball as a component of either social history or cultural studies. Almost immediately, Crepeau and Riess were followed by a significant number of professional historians who treated baseball history with academic respect and scholarly integrity.

## II

Fittingly, baseball's formative years have received the most extensive study during the past 13 years. Notwithstanding considerable research into the antecedents and the origins of baseball, historians had largely ignored the quarter-century of the game's history prior to the creation of the first professional association in 1871.<sup>8</sup> Even the authors of the two standard comprehensive baseball histories treated the "amateur era" as but a prelude to professional game: Seymour was content merely to describe the rules of various bat-and-ball games and recount the administrative decisions of national associations, while Voigt simply stated the existence of pre-professional baseball sans elaboration. Such neglect was unfortunate, for the experiences of baseball's first three decades produced the structural and attitudinal framework(s) for the game's subsequent history. Happily, Melvin Adelman, George Kirsch, and Warren Goldstein collectively have not only provided a comprehensive analysis of the game's early history, but also placed baseball squarely within the context of an emerging urban-industrial America.

Concerned with "the transformation of American athletics from its premodern to modern form" in New York City from 1820 to 1870, Adelman's seminal *A Sporting Time* (1986), one-third of which is devoted to ball games, is arguably the single most important treatment to date of the origins of organized baseball. Stressing that "from the outset organized baseball was an urban product," he goes far beyond extending back the date of the first reported contests between organized clubs (1843) and revising previous notions of both the composition of the New York Knickerbockers (middle, not upper class) and the relative importance of baseball (little) in club activities. His primary contributions to early baseball history are threefold. First, he argues after an extensive analysis of the socioeconomic backgrounds of members of organized clubs that baseball players were overwhelmingly of the middle class. Second, he explains Americans' preference for baseball over cricket partly to the inner dynamics of the games, but primarily to cricket's English domination, upper-class orientation, and because "it was too advanced and too institutionalized for a society which lacked a manly ball-playing tradition." Finally, he attributes the ascendancy of baseball by the 1850s as the "national pastime" to the democratization of the game and the ways in which its fast-paced and dramatic action and emphasis on individual play within a team context meshed with prevailing social

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8. See, for example, Robert W. Henderson, *Ball, Bat and Bishop: The Origin of Ball Games* (New York: Rockport Press, 1947) and Harold Peterson, *The Man Who Invented Baseball* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969).

and cultural imperatives. Adelman does more than describe the development of baseball and other sports. His adroit use of modernization theory as an analytical framework for viewing both the rise of baseball in American society and developments within the sport itself “enables the historical study of sport to move beyond the current tendency to see sport as a mirror of society and to perceive sports change as solely a by-product of larger societal alterations.” While the application of modernization theory is often belabored or strained and ultimately may be a more effective construct for organizing than analyzing historical events, there is no denying Adelman’s contentions that the origins of “modern” sport should be pushed back some 50 years to the second quarter of the nineteenth century and that baseball, like all sports, has an historical dynamic of its own instead of being merely a reflection or extension of other institutions.<sup>9</sup> And if he overemphasizes the importance of organized as opposed to unorganized baseball, uses broadly inclusive socioeconomic categories, and offers a largely self-evident explanation for the game’s designation as the national pastime. Adelman’s landmark study became the analytical and informational touchstone for future research on the historical origins of baseball.

Three years later, two books appeared that both complemented and extended Adelman’s work from either end of the methodological spectrum—George Kirsch’s *Creation of America Team Sports* and Warren Goldstein’s *Playing for Keeps*. Kirsch’s comparative study of baseball and cricket during the middle third of the nineteenth century has a dual objective: To explain why the former became “the favored game on this side of the Atlantic” and to analyze “those aspects” of the two sports “that were significant in the social and cultural life of nineteenth-century American cities.” Although the book’s most striking and original contributions concern the neglected sport of cricket, it offers important new information and insights into the early baseball history. He draws heavily on Adelman’s work, but breaks new ground in detailing the formation of ball clubs both black and white, emphasizing the vast popularity of recreational as opposed to organized baseball, examining townball in Philadelphia and the “Massachusetts game” in New England, analyzing the composition and deportment of spectators, relating intra- and interurban economic rivalries to competition on the playing fields, and delineating the ethical and competitive arguments surrounding baseball’s transition from an amateur to a professional sport. Broadly concerned with how cricket and baseball related to the economic, social, and political realities of mid-nineteenth century America, Kirsch understands that, “larger societal issues” notwithstanding, it is fundamentally important to know how and by whom the games were played. Thus his explanation of why baseball became the national pastime while cricket virtually disappeared from the American sports scene is persuasively grounded not only in cultural imperatives, but also in the structural characteristics of the sports themselves—rules, facilities, and playing

9. Melvin L. Adelman, *Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics, 1820-1870* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986), pp. vii, 110, 121.

techniques. Kirsch's most impressive achievement is a detailed demographic analysis—birthplace, age, occupation, wealth, and residence—of players in Philadelphia and five New Jersey communities. Consistent with Adelman's study of New York City ballplayers in revealing that the majority of participants on organized baseball teams were native born and middle class. Kirsch's tabulations are far more extensive and precise and effectively demonstrate the socioeconomic differences between ballists and cricketers.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to the exacting and exhaustive archival research of Kirsch's "new social history," Goldstein offers a fresh and imaginative rereading of New York City's sporting press and baseball guides as texts for analyzing the culture and consciousness of organized baseball—"the way early baseball was felt, perceived, thought about, and experienced"—from the 1850s to the formation of the National League in 1876. The result is not a normative history of early baseball, but instead a profound explication of the attitudinal tensions between "modernizers" and "traditionalists" that obtained during baseball's transformation from a game dominated by social clubs of like-minded and similarly situated middle-class men to a professional sport embraced by urban working classes—the thrill of victory vs. the pleasure of participation, polite decorum vs. enthusiastic exuberance, manliness vs. boyishness, and the joyful spirit of play vs. the serious ethic of work. Equally impressive is how Goldstein puts new interpretive spins on old issues, as with brief but intriguing postulations of the ways in which the cultural sensibilities of players affected the game on and off the field and how umpires and women functioned as agents of social control. Despite an occasional flight of interpretive fancy and a narrow research base which makes uncertain whether his analyses apply beyond New York, Goldstein has produced an anthropology of early baseball which is both audaciously original, as in the formulation of baseball as a social common ground for artisanal and bourgeois cultures, and sensitive to nuances, as in the depiction of uniforms as class symbols. Finally, Goldstein's work offers two ingenious formulations with long-term implications for baseball history. First, the notion of baseball as interplay between work and play is a compelling trope for explaining the game's inherent qualities as well as its initial formulation and persistent if ambivalent appeal as the National Pastime. Second, the postulation that the rise of professional baseball produced bifurcated histories of the game, the one "linear, chronological, and material" (a rational acceptance of baseball as sporting work/business played purely "for keeps") and the other "cyclical, repetitive, and emotional" (a nostalgic longing for imagined "good old days" when the game was played primarily for fun) is a persuasive construct for both organizing and understanding baseball historiography.<sup>11</sup>

10. George B. Kirsch, *The Creation of America Team Sports: Baseball and cricket, 1838-72* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989), pp. xii.

11. Warren Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps: A History of Early Baseball* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 2, 6, 155. Suggestive in this regard is Michael Oriard's use of "game", "play" and "sport" as metaphors for understanding American culture in *Sporting with the Gods: The Rhetoric of Play and Game in American Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

Would that the detailed, thoughtful studies of baseball in the mid-nineteenth century have been replicated for other chronological eras. While periodization—the Deadball Era, the Golden Age, the Era of Continental Expansion—looms large in discussions of baseball history, academics have not, save for Riess’s work on the Progressive Era, undertaken the tightly focused examinations of discrete time-frames that traditionally are staples of the historian’s repertoire. Despite the obvious importance of understanding fully the ways in which professional baseball established economic and cultural hegemony, Seymour’s remains the standard treatment of baseball’s “Gilded Age,” the last quarter of the nineteenth century. And while scholars in a variety of subfields of American history have produced numerous studies of the “home front” during wartime, the impact of World War I on the game remains yet to be studied, and only a trio of suggestive books by popular writers discuss baseball during World War II.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, historians have frequently used close examinations of particularly eventful years to capture the “temper of the times” and integrate disparate events, but the “slice-of-history” approach in baseball history remains almost exclusively the province of non-professionals, who have focused narrowly on pennant races and landmark player or team performances. The fiftieth anniversary of the year in which Joe DiMaggio hit safely in 56 consecutive games, Ted Williams batted .406, and the United States entered World War II spawned three “season chronicles,” only one of which was written by an academic. If the attempt by Michael Seidel, professor of English at Columbia University, to place DiMaggio’s hitting streak within the context of domestic events and worsening war in Europe is strained, it nonetheless suggests the analytical potential of conflating the sporting and non-sporting events of 1941.<sup>13</sup>

More surprising, scholars have ignored the basic structural components of professional baseball—leagues and franchises. Histories of leagues, the principal cartels for administrating and marketing commercial baseball, are relatively few in number and usually consist of anecdotal season-by-season summaries supplemented by team records, player statistics, and superficial

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12. See, for example, Bill Gilbert, *They Also Served: Baseball and the Home Front, 1941-1945* (New York: Crown, 1992); Richard Goldstein, *Spartan Seasons: How Baseball Survived the Second World War* (New York: Macmillan, 1980); and William B. Mead, *Baseball Goes to War* (Washington, D.C.: Farragut Publishing Co., 1985), the third revision and retitling of a book originally published as *Even the Browns* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1978).

13. Michael Seidel, *Streak: Joe DiMaggio and the Summer of '41* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988). See also Robert W. Creamer, *Baseball in '41: A celebration of the best baseball season ever—in the year America went to war* (New York: Viking, 1991) and Dom DiMaggio with Bill Gilbert, *Real Grass, Real Heroes: Baseball's Historic 1941 Season* (New York: Kensington Publishing Corp., 1990). The best of the genre is Red Barber’s remembrance of Jackie Robinson’s first year with the Brooklyn Dodgers, *1947—When All Hell Broke Loose in Baseball* (New York: Doubleday, 1982), a book whose importance as an eyewitness account of history-making events is limited because Barber’s view from “the catbird seat” did not extend beyond the ball yard. Typical examples of the “seasonal” histories are David Halberstam, *Summer of '49* (New York: William Morrow, 1989); Ray Robinson, *The Home Run Heard 'Round the World: The Dramatic Story of the 1951 Giants-Dodgers Pennant Race* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991); and two chronicles of the 1961 New York Yankees: Tony Kubek and Terry Pluto, *Sixty-One: The Team, The Record, The Men* (New York: Macmillan, 1987); and Ralph Houk and Robert Creamer, *Season of Glory: The Amazing Saga of the 1961 New York Yankees* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1988).

biographical sketches of prominent executives, players, and managers. William J. Ryczek's detailed chronicle of the National Association of Professional Baseball Players, David Pietrusza's encyclopedic survey of the rise and demise of some 18 "major leagues" formed since 1871, and Marc Okkonen's brief account of the Federal League are carefully researched, pioneering studies.<sup>14</sup> They provide invaluable information, but ultimately are more suggestive than definitive because the authors, none of whom are professional historians, have not systematically analyzed the leagues from the perspective of social, political, and economic developments in society at large. The American and National leagues since 1901 have had a markedly different approach to the governing, marketing, and even the playing and umpiring of major league baseball; the absence of even a single scholarly history of the circuits ranks among the most conspicuous lacunae in baseball literature. Only slightly less glaring is the lack of serious team histories. Little progress has been made since the appearance in the late 1940s and early 1950s of G. P. Putnam's 16-volume series written mostly by baseball beat writers. Typical of the more recent team histories are a eulogy of the Milwaukee Braves, a journalistic account of the New York Giants, and a game-by-game chronicle of the short-lived Seattle Pilots; atypical is Richard Goldstein's chronicle of Brooklyn baseball, a well-researched synthesis that emphasizes historical context and includes attention to black baseball.<sup>15</sup> The best historical assessments of most franchises are the essays in Peter Bjarkman's *Encyclopedia of Major League Baseball Team Histories*.<sup>16</sup> The neglect of teams is lamentable, for the board room is more important than the ball field in understanding the baseball industry as well as the relationship between clubs and the communities in which they operate. Franchises are not only private businesses, but also quasipublic enterprises of socioeconomic import to their resident neighborhoods. More than any other sport, baseball affords a cultural middle ground wherein diverse groups share much more than rooting for the home team. Suggestive in this regard is social historian Hub Walker's considered "thought piece" about Cincinnati and the Reds during the 1970s, wherein the composition of the team is seen as a reflection of the "predominant values of the city and its surrounding region."<sup>17</sup>

14. William J. Ryczek, *Blackguards and Red Stockings: A History of Baseball's National Association, 1871-1875* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992); David Pietrusza, *Major Leagues: The Formation. Sometimes Absorption and Mostly Inevitable Demise of 18 Professional Baseball Organizations, 1871 to Present* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1991); and Marc Okkonen, *The Federal League of 1914-15: Baseball's Third Major League* (Garrett Park, MD: Society for American Baseball Research, 1889).

15. Bob Buege, *The Milwaukee Braves: A Baseball Eulogy* (Milwaukee, WI: Douglas American Sports Publications, 1988); Noel Hynd, *The Giants of the Polo Grounds: The Glorious Times of Baseball's New York Giants* (New York: Doubleday, 1988); Carson Van Lindt, *The Seattle Pilots Story* (New York: Marabou Publishing, 1993); and Richard Goldstein, *Superstars and Screwballs: 100 Years of Brooklyn Baseball* (New York: Dutton, 1991).

16. Peter C. Bjarkman, ed., *Encyclopedia of Major League Baseball Team Histories: National League and Encyclopedia of Major League Baseball Team Histories: American League* (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1991). Annotated bibliographies provide excellent guides to published material on each team.

17. Robert Harris Walker, *Cincinnati and the Big Red Machine* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. xi.

Especially instructive would be comparative studies of cities which had both American and National League clubs—the Cubs and White Sox of Chicago, the Browns and Cardinals of St. Louis, the Braves and Red Sox of Boston, and, of course, the tri-borough teams of New York.<sup>18</sup>

Two path-breaking studies illustrate the potential of team histories. James Miller's *The Baseball Business* is a trenchant business history of the Baltimore Orioles baseball company from its transfer from St. Louis in 1954 through 1989. To compensate for the unavailability of team financial records, Miller made impressive use of government documents in analyzing ownership changes and club operations, management and marketing strategies, relations between the major and minor leagues, labor (player) relations, and the team's complex political and economic relationships with city, county, and state governments. The portrayal of the team's fortunes from the perspective of the front office instead of the field is strikingly original, but a fine study would have been substantially better had Miller conducted additional interviews to gain more of an "inside" perspective on club operations, evaluated professional baseball as "an important part of the entertainment business," or assessed the club's relationship with and impact on the larger community, especially African-Americans.<sup>19</sup> By contrast, the interaction between a team and its host community is precisely the focus of Bruce Kuklick's *To Everything a Season*, a "biography" of Shibe Park, later Connie Mack Stadium, from 1909 to 1976. Kuklick's concern is less the ballpark and ball games than how people thought about the facility and the events that transpired therein. Here is an excellent explication of, among other things, the planning and construction of Shibe Park; the on- and off-field performance of its primary occupants, the Philadelphia Athletics and later the Phillies; its economic and social roles in North Philadelphia; and the ways in which community attitudes and urban politics led to its demolition. Especially intriguing is his analysis of the ballpark's role in forging among disparate fans shared sensibilities and a common historical consciousness that persisted after it was tom down.<sup>20</sup> Miller and Kuklick promise much more than they deliver, but their seminal studies clearly demonstrate that baseball teams are cultural institutions as well as capitalistic enterprises and that ballparks are both places of business and public buildings.

Inexplicably, scholars have overlooked baseball's most conspicuous feature, the ballpark. Whether called fields, parks, or stadia, the arenas in which the game is played are fundamentally important to understanding baseball history.

18. Highly suggestive of research possibilities is the "inside look" at New York City baseball by ex-sport writer Roger Kahn, *The Era: 1947-1957. When the Yankees, the Giants, and the Dodgers Ruled the World* (New York Ticknor & Fields, 1993) and two wonderfully insightful "fan testimonials" from Chicago's North and South Side respectively: Douglas Bukowski, *Baseball Palace of the World: The Last Year of Comiskey Park* (Chicago: Lyceum Books, 1992), a "diary" of the ballpark's last year written by a professor of history and leader of the Save Our Sox group, and Barry Gifford, *The Neighborhood of Baseball: A Personal History of the Chicago Cubs* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1981; rev. ed. San Francisco: Donald S. Ellis, 1985).

19. James Edward Miller, *The Baseball Business: Pursuing Pennants and Profits in Baltimore* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), p. vii.

20. Bruce Kuklick, *To Everything a Season: Shibe Park and Urban Philadelphia, 1909-1976* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

Ballparks are more than baseball theatres and neighborhood central places. Their architecture reveals much about the ways owners envisioned the game being played and watched as well as the physical realities and esthetic values of urban America, while their construction tells much about the politics of financing and land acquisition. Not coincidentally, the periodization of ballpark design and construction—the “Wooden Era” (1871-1908), the “Steel and Concrete Era” (1909-1960), the “Multipurpose Stadium Era” (1960-1991), and the “Neo-Classic Era” (1991-present)—parallels major economic stages in the development of the baseball industry. Controversy over the razing of vintage facilities in favor of more profitable modern stadia has greatly increased historical interest in ballparks. Philip Lowrey’s *Green Cathedrals* and Michael Benson’s *Ballparks of North America* are invaluable reference works, notwithstanding numerous errors and absence of analysis. *Queen of Diamonds* by Michael Betzold and Ethan Casey combines a manifesto for the preservation of Tiger Stadium with a revealing history of professional baseball in Detroit. Peter Richmond’s *Ballpark* is an insightful journalistic account of the building of Baltimore’s Camden Yards.<sup>21</sup> Of the several recent photographic histories, Michael Gershman, *Diamonds: The Evolution of the Ballpark*, is in a class by itself.<sup>22</sup> Beautifully designed and illustrated, this chronologically arranged profile of major league ballparks greatly advances the genre by discussing individual edifices within the historical context of their local community, the baseball industry, and the nation. But because Gershman relied almost exclusively on secondary sources pertaining only to baseball and eschewed any interpretative framework, *Diamonds* is no more than a comprehensive overview of the history of ballparks and a guide to research opportunities. A truly satisfying understanding of the historical evolution of ballparks awaits detailed examinations of individual facilities based upon research in municipal records and analytical general histories informed by architectural and urban studies. Still, it is unlikely that future research will challenge fundamentally his implied thesis that ballparks have always reflected first and foremost the financial interests of baseball’s owners rather than its consumers.

The entrepreneurial nature of Organized Baseball is a self-evident truth. As Seymour put it: “Contrary to widespread belief, professional baseball is not a sport. It is a commercialized amusement business.”<sup>23</sup> Until recently,

21. Philip J. Lowrey, *Green Cathedrals* (Cooperstown, NY: Society for American Baseball Research, 1986; rev. ed., Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1992); Michael Benson, *Ballparks of North America: A Comprehensive Historical Reference to Ball Grounds, Yards and Stadiums, 1845 to Present* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1989); Michael Betzold and Ethan Casey, *Queen of Diamonds: The Tiger Stadium Story* (West Bloomfield, MI: A & M Publishing Company, 1992); and Peter Richmond, *Ballpark: Camden Yards and the Building of an American Dream* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993).

22. Michael Gershman, *Diamonds: The Evolution of the Ballpark* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993). Other noteworthy illustrated histories are Lowell Reidenbaugh, *Take Me Out to the Ballpark* (St. Louis: The Sporting News, 1983; rev. ed., 1987), and Lawrence R. Ritter, *Lost Ballparks: A Celebration of Baseball’s Legendary Fields* (New York: Viking, 1992), both of which include minor league parks. James Takach and Joshua B. Stein, *The Fields of Summer: America’s Great Ballparks and the Players Who Triumphed in Them* (New York: Crescent Books, 1992), showcases players and memorabilia more than the parks themselves.

23. *Baseball: The Early Years*, p. 3.

historical treatments of the baseball industry have been impressionistic and largely uninformed by economic principles and management theory. Apropos the recent ascendancy of contracts over box scores, the economics of professional baseball has received unprecedented attention. Club and league financial records are not open to researchers, but economists have provided in-depth and sophisticated studies of the baseball business from the abundant financial data concerning major league baseball available in public documents,<sup>24</sup> A perceptive but narrowly focused history of the origin of and subsequent challenges to the reserve clause by historian Lee Lowenfish and ex-player Tony Lupien, an ahistorical survey of player-management relations by economist Kenneth Jennings, and a controversial study of the Brooklyn Dodgers' relocation in Los Angeles by Neil Sullivan, professor of public administration, demonstrate ways in which baseball history has been shaped more by the figures appearing on the bottom lines in accounting departments than by those performing between the white lines of the playing field.<sup>25</sup> A revealing, albeit biased, behind-the-scenes look at the operation of a union in the sports industry is Marvin Miller's *A Whole Different Ball Game*, the expansive autobiography of the first executive director of the Major League Baseball Player's Association.<sup>26</sup> The explication of the ways in which professional sports franchises extort or exploit local governments to advance private economic interests contained in political scientist Charles Euchner's *Playing the Field* finds specific confirmation in Peter Richmond's *Ballpark*, an examination of the politics and finances of Baltimore's new stadium, and Bob Andelman's *Stadium for Rent*, an account of Tampa Bay's quest to obtain major league baseball.<sup>27</sup> Still for all the recent attention given the business of baseball, the game's economic history remains unclear. Much of the research suffers from being discipline specific: Historians infrequently

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24. The best primers on the baseball business are Andrew Zimbalist, *Baseball and Billions: A Probing Look Inside the Big Business of Our National Pastime* (New York: Basic Books, 1992) and Gerald W. Scully, *The Business of Major League Baseball* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). See also Paul M. Sommers, ed., *Diamonds Are Forever: The Business of Baseball* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1992); James Quirk and Rodney D. Fort, *Pay Dirt: The Business of Professional Team Sports* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); and Paul D. Staudohar, *The Sports Industry and Collective Bargaining* (Ithaca, NY: New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, 1986).

25. Lee Lowenfish and Tony Lupien, *The Imperfect Diamond: The Story of Baseball's Reserve System and the Men Who Fought To Change It* (New York: Stein and Day, 1980; rev. ed. by Lowenfish, DaCapo Press, 1991); Kenneth M. Jennings, *Balls and Strikes: The Money Game in Professional Baseball* (New York: Praeger, 1989); and Neil J. Sullivan, *The Dodgers Move West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Three books written for popular audiences are historically problematic, but still offer a variety of important insights: Neil J. Sullivan's synthetic and superficial *The Diamond Revolution: The Prospector Baseball After the Collapse of Its Ruling Class* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); John Feinstein, *Play Ball: The Life and Troubled Times of Major League Baseball* (New York: Villard Books, 1993); and Jack Sands and Peter Gammons, *Coming Apart at the Seams* (New York: Macmillan, 1993).

26. Marvin Miller, *A Whole Different Game: The Sport and Business of Baseball* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1991).

27. Charles C. Euchner, *Playing the Field: Why Sports Teams Move and Cities Fight to Keep Them* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Peter Richmond, *Ballpark: Camden Yards and the Building of an American Dream*; and Bob Andelman, *Stadium for Rent: Tampa Bay's Quest Major League Baseball* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1993). See also David Whitford, *Playing Hardball: The High Stakes Battle for Baseball's New Franchises* (New York: Doubleday, 1993).

draw upon the insights and methods of the social sciences, while social scientists frequently lack historical perspective. Sorely needed are a comprehensive economic history of the professional baseball industry, additional studies of individual clubs like Miller's work on the Orioles, and specialized studies of, say, franchise relocations, baseball's relationship with the radio and television industries, and that classic example of vertical: integration, the farm system.

The minor leagues warrant scholarly research for reasons beyond the organizational nexus with the majors. Much more than a proving ground for players and managers, the minors are an ideal medium for examining cultural and economic aspects of professional baseball. Interest in minor league baseball has increased dramatically in recent years, partly because the "bush leagues" are less tainted by persistent labor-management squabbles and more intimately connected with host communities. The "purity" of minor league baseball is easily exaggerated, but in the minors there is a clearer cojoining of baseball as "sport" and "business" as well as closer connections between team operations and local circumstances. Anthony Violanti's study of baseball in Buffalo and Arthur Johnson's case studies of stadia construction touch upon the many ways in which baseball impacts the social, cultural, and political life of communities.<sup>28</sup>

Minor league histories to date exhibit the same historiographical characteristics and afford the same research opportunities as major league baseball. The minors are at once more national and regional than the majors, historically comprising more than 300 leagued and 3,000 franchises in some 1,500 cities and towns. Even more than the majors, the minors are the sum of very different franchises. The decentralized, even localized, nature of minor league baseball necessitates studies of individual circuits (especially the Pacific Coast League, which uniquely straddled the line between "major" and "minor" league status) as well as influential franchises, team owners, and administrators. None of the numerous histories of minor league teams and circuits is scholarly in nature; most are privately published compendia of seasonal play, memorable feats, and statistical records written by fans for fans.<sup>29</sup> Nor are there serious biographies of executives who so profoundly shaped the course of minor league history—William Bramham, J. Alvin

28. Anthony Violanti, *Miracle in Buffalo: How the Dream of Baseball Revived a City* (New York: St. Martin's, 1991), and Arthur T. Johnson, *Minor League Baseball and Local Economic Development* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

29. For the promises and problems of minor league history, see John E. Spalding, *Always on Sunday: The California Baseball League, 1886 to 1915* (Manhattan, KS: Ag Press, 1992); David Pietrusza, *Baseball's Canadian-American League: A History of Its Inception, Franchises, Participants, Locales, Statistics, Demise and Legacy, 1936-1951* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1990) and a quartet of books written by Bill O'Neal, a history professor at Panola Junior College in Texas, and published by the Eakin Press in Austin, Texas: *The Texas League, 1888-1987: A Century of Baseball* (1987); *The Pacific Coast League, 1903-1988* (1990); *The American Association: A Baseball History, 1902-1991* (1991); and *The International League: A Baseball History, 1884-1991* (1992). The best team histories are a pair of companion pieces by Richard E. Beverage, *The Hollywood Stars: Baseball in Movieland, 1926-1957* (Placentia, CA: The Deacon Press, 1984) and *The Angels: Los Angeles in the Pacific Coast League, 1919-1957* (Placentia, CA: The Deacon Press, 1981). See also privately published studies by Frank M. Keetz, *Class "C" Baseball: A Case Study of the Schenectady Blue Jays in the Canadian-American League 1946-1950* (1988) and *They, Too, Were "Boys of Summer": A Case Study of the Schenectady Blue Jays in the Eastern League 1951-1957* (1993).

Gardner, Frank Shaughnessy, and George Trautman. Correspondingly, general surveys of the minor leagues are sorely inadequate.<sup>30</sup> Finally, studies of the National Association and the often adversarial administrative and financial relationships between the major and minor leagues are essential for understanding the working of professional baseball.<sup>31</sup>

Baseball history cannot be appreciated fully apart from baseball lives. Given its confederated governance structure and exemption from federal anti-trust laws, Organized Baseball, more than most business enterprises, has been shaped decisively by powerful voices within the industry itself. Yet, inexplicably, there are no serious biographies of many key personages—publicists Henry Chadwick and J. G. Taylor Spink, commissioners Kenesaw Mountain Landis and Ford Frick, league presidents Warren Giles and Joe Cronin, and powerful owners like Charles Finley, Connie Mack, Waker O'Malley, Jacob Ruppert, Chris Von der Ahe, Philip Wrigley, and Tom Yawkey whose clubs cannot be understood apart from their persona. Recent lives of Calvin Griffith, Larry MacPhail, Branch Rickey, and Bill Veeck are poorly researched hagiographies that only underscore the need for scholarly biographies.<sup>32</sup> Biographers have served players and managers no better than administrators. Save for Charles Alexander's biographies of Ty Cobb and John McGraw, Michael Seidel's Ted Williams, and Paul Zingg's Harry Hooper, biographies of "on-field" personnel continue to be superficially researched and written for uncritical fans. Awaiting scholarly lives are such major figures as Harry Wright, John Montgomery Ward, Honous Wagner, Walter Johnson, Christy Mathewson, Rogers Hornsby, Joe McCarthy, Lou Gehrig, Hank Greenberg, Joe DiMaggio, Casey Stengel, Jackie Robinson, and Roberto Clemente.<sup>33</sup>

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30. Although poorly researched and presented in a format more encyclopedic than historical, Robert Obojski, *Bush League: A History of Minor League Baseball* (New York: Macmillan, 1975) remains the best single-volume history of the minor leagues. Neil J. Sullivan, *The Minors: The Struggles and the Triumph of Baseball's Poor Relation from 1976 to the Present* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990) exhibits the pitfalls of writing a synthesis on a subject which has received little substantive research. The few valuable parts of Mike Blake's *The Minor Leagues: A Celebration of the Little Show* (New York: Wynwood Press, 1991) are derivative.

31. Lloyd Johnson and Miles Wolff, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Minor League Baseball* (Durham, NC: Baseball America, 1993) is the first comprehensive compendium of minor league records. Despite numerous inconsistencies, omissions, and inaccuracies in the first edition, the volume hopefully will stimulate as well as aid future research in minor league history.

32. Jon Kerr, *Calvin: Baseball's Last Dinosaur* (Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown, 1990); Don Warfield, *The Roaring Redhead: Larry MacPhail—Baseball's Great Innovator* (South Bend, IN: Diamond Communications, 1987); Murray Polner, *Branch Rickey: A Biography* (New York: Atheneum, 1982); and Gerald Eskenazi, *Bill Veeck: A Baseball Legend* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988).

33. Charles C. Alexander, *Ty Cobb* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984) and *John McGraw* (New York Viking, 1988); Michael Seidel, *Ted Williams: A Baseball Life* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1991); and Paul J. Zingg, *Harry Hooper: An American Baseball Life* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993). Only a handful of recent biographies of players warrant attention by scholars. Ray Robinson's *Iron Horse: Lou Gehrig in His Time* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990) and *Matty: An American Hero* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) are disappointingly thin. Robert Creamer's acclaimed *Stengel: His Life and Times* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984) is perceptive, beautifully written, but cursorily researched. Jack B. Moore's *Joe DiMaggio: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986) is valuable despite acknowledged limitations, while George De Gregerio's *Joe DiMaggio: An Informal Biography* (New York: Stein and Day, 1981) is superficial. David Falkner's *The Last Yankee: The Turbulent Life of Billy Martin* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992) bristles with insights and understandings of the man if not his times. A perceptive dual-biography is James Reston, Jr., *Collision at Home Plate: The Lives of Pete Rose and Bart Giamatti* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

Fortunately, two thoroughly researched and cogently argued scholarly biographical works stand out both as important contributions to baseball history: Peter Levine's *A. G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball* and Eugene Murdock's *Ban Johnson*. Spalding was the most important baseball figure during the late nineteenth century, and Levine skillfully assesses his profound influence as a player, owner, propagandist, and sporting goods manufacturer. What makes this life-and-times study so compelling and important is Levine's framing Spalding's career within the context of the prevailing social, cultural, political, and entrepreneurial values of post-Civil War industrial America. Effectively showing how Spalding's "personal story intersected with the larger culture," Levine concludes that "A. G." was "the key figure in the establishment of the white world of professional baseball as a viable commercial enterprise and as an acceptable pastime for Victorian America."<sup>34</sup> More detailed in treatment but less expansive in scope is Murdock's full-life of Byron Bancroft "Ban" Johnson. Painstakingly delineating Johnson's role first in establishing the American League in 1900 and then in steering the junior circuit along developmental lines markedly different from the senior National League, Murdock addresses virtually every important issue in professional baseball during the first quarter of the twentieth century. He is at his best in describing Johnson's actions as a baseball executive, as in providing a richly detailed and insightful account of the internecine "war" between the American and National leagues. However, Murdock falls short in assessing Johnson the man, as in unquestioningly siding with Johnson in the conflicts with Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis that forced his retirement in 1927. Irreconcilable confrontation between the two men was inevitable when Landis took office in 1920 inasmuch as they were equally arrogant, dictatorial, self-righteous, and obsessed with reforming the game's image. But Murdock considers it a tragedy that Johnson "did not leave when his work was done" and thus "by remaining in office while shorn of his old power, he invited the final indignity." By frequently writing as an advocate instead of a biographer, Murdock mars an otherwise fine book.<sup>35</sup>

It is surprising not that the best biographies of baseball figures have been written by professional historians, but that so few academics have been attracted to the art of biography.<sup>36</sup> If biography, a literary genre related to but distinct from history, does not explain the historical process, examinations of the lives of prominent historical figures assuredly abet an understanding of it. Levine's

34. Peter Levine, *A. G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball: The Promise of American Sport* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. xi.

35. Eugene C. Murdock, *Ban Johnson: Czar of Baseball* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), p. xii.

36. Given the paucity of biographical information available on presumed well-known personages associated with the game's history, the more than 500 biographical sketches with selected bibliographies contained in the first volume of David L. Porter, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of American Sports: Baseball* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987) are invaluable. For an additional 249 sketches of baseball figures, see Porter's *Biographical Dictionary of American Sports: 1989-1992 Supplement*. . . . (1992). Mike Shatzkin, ed., *The Ballplayers: Baseball's Ultimate Biographical Reference* (New York: William Morrow, 1990) is egregiously mistitled: There are many non-players among the 6,000 entries, and most of the sketches are too brief and anecdotal to be of much value.

*Spalding* and Murdock's *Johnson* illustrate the promise and problems of baseball (sport?) biography. Biographies are defined by sources, and for only a few baseball personalities is there sufficient information to probe deeply into private lives. The result is often a "partial life," essentially a public or career profile. Truncated biographies are not often satisfying, but Levine's placement of Spalding within the context his day produced a revealing portrait of the man and his times. Conversely, Murdock, by treating Johnson solely within the confines of Organized Baseball, created a largely one-dimensional profile that proscribes appreciating his significance beyond baseball. A second problem is the nature of source materials. Instead of catalogued manuscript collections, the baseball biographer must glean bits of information from a wide array of unindexed periodical literature, primarily newspapers. The task is the more difficult because the press, even in the same city, afforded markedly different coverage of baseball while reporting similarly on, say, political and economic matters. Both *Spalding* and *Johnson* rest firmly on thorough research, but Murdock conducted much more extensive research in periodical literature in order to detail the "facts" of Johnson's life, while Levine consulted widely scholarly literature to place the man in his times. All biographers face the challenge of analytical distance, and on balance historians have fared no better than sportswriters in treating sports figures critically and dispassionately. Levine acknowledges Spalding's achievements, but disparagingly asserts that "historical context, not individual genius" explains his successes; Murdock, on the other hand, exaggerates Johnson's achievements and dubs him "the foremost of the founding fathers of baseball."<sup>37</sup> Finally, while players are easily the most popular subjects for biographers, the best baseball biographies by far are of executives. It is, after all, much easier to relate management to broad organizational and economic themes and even social issues than to elevate ball players to significance beyond on-field performances. That, however, begs the fundamental question: Why are all administrators but only a handful of players considered legitimate historical figures and thus appropriate subjects for biography?

Autobiographies continue to be a principal rather than supplemental source of information about the private lives and personal views of baseball figures. With few exceptions, they are superficial, purely commercial ghost-written or "as-told-to" productions designed for hero-worshipping fans. Often characterized by serious sins of omission and commission ranging from simplification and exaggeration to silence and dishonesty, these pseudo-autobiographies are generally untrustworthy as first-person narratives. Moreover, it is difficult, at times impossible, to determine what portions of these bastardized collaborations constitute the subject's recollections as opposed to the writer's gratuitous additions; more than one ball player has publically disavowed statements contained in his own published autobiography. However, it is heartening that in recent years "autobiographies" are increasingly being written with a sense of history and with candor about

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37. Levine. *A. G. Spalding*, p. xii; Murdock, *Ban Johnson*, p. xi.

issues of interest to historians.<sup>38</sup>

Potentially more valuable than usually self-serving memoirs are personal remembrances. Since the appearance of Lawrence Ritter's seminal *The Glory of Their Times* (1966), collections of edited interviews—"oral histories"—have grown in popularity, sophistication, and importance.<sup>39</sup> The genre has held a special attraction for academics, perhaps owing to an heightened appreciation for the preservation of eyewitness accounts. Anthologies by Ritter, a finance professor, historian Eugene Murdock, and Walter Langford, a professor of Modern Languages, have preserved the remembrances of 70 men who played in the major leagues during the first half of this century.<sup>40</sup> Bringing to the interviews the scholarly perspective of scholars, they frequently elicited from their subjects invaluable reflections about matters of interest to historians rather than simple musings about the "good old days." The same standards of quality and historical relevance do not obtain in the "oral histories" of more modern players, although Cynthia Wilber took advantage of her personal familiarity with baseball and the good offices of her father, ex-major leaguer Del Wilber, to compile an excellent collection of 42 interviews with players from the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>41</sup> Increasingly popular "team oral histories," featuring the recollections of team personnel, mostly players, are particularly instructive in offering direct observations about specific events and personalities instead of distant and random recollections.<sup>42</sup> In a class by itself is Richard Bak's *Cobb Would Have Caught It*, which

38. The best of the recent autobiographies are Henry Aaron with Lonnie Wheeler, *I Had A Hammer: The Hank Aaron Story* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991); Buzzie Bavazi with John Strege, *Off the Record* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1987); Albert Benjamin Chandler with Vance Trimble, *Heroes, Plain Folks, and Skunks: The Life and Times of Happy Chandler* (Chicago: Bonus Books, 1989); Ira Berkow, ed., *Hank Greenberg: The Story of My Life* (New York: Times Books, 1989); Bowie Kuhn, *Hardball: The Education of a Baseball Commissioner* (New York: Times Books, 1987); Lee MacPhai, *My 9 Innings: An Autobiography of 50 Years in Baseball* (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1989); Dave Pallone with Alan Steinberg, *Behind the Mask: My Double Life in Baseball* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1990); Dick Williams and Bill Plaschke, *No More Mr. Nice Guy: A Life of Hardball* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990); Dick Bartell with Norman L. Macht, *Rowdy Richard: A Firsthand Account of the National League Baseball Wars of the 1930s and the Men Who Fought Them* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1987); and Rex Barney with Norman L. Macht, *Rex Barney's Thank Youuuu for 50 Years in Baseball from Brooklyn to Baltimore* (Centerville, MD: Tidewater Publishers, 1993).

39. Lawrence S. Ritter, ed., *The Glory of Their Times: The Story of the Early Days of Baseball Told by the Men Who Play It* (New York: Macmillan, 1966 enl. ed., 1984).

40. Eugene Murdock, ed., *Baseball Players and Their Times: Oral Histories of the Game, 1920-1940* (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1991) and *Baseball Between the Wars: Memories of the Game by the Men Who Played It* (Westport CT: Meckler, 1992); Walter M. Langford, ed., *Legends of Baseball: An Oral History of The Game's Golden Age* (South Bend, IN: Diamond Communications, 1987).

41. Cynthia J. Wilber, *For the Love of the Game: Baseball Memories from the Men Who Were There* (New York: Morrow, 1992). See also Rich Westcott, *Diamond Greats: Profiles and Interviews with 65 of Baseball's History Makers* (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1988); Lee Heiman, Dave Deiner, and Bill Gutman, *When the Cheering Stops: Ex-Major Leaguers Talk About Their Game and Their Lives* (New York: Macmillan, 1990); Michael Fedo, *One Shining Season* (New York: Pharos Books, 1991); and Brent Kelley, *Baseball Stars of the 1950s: Interviews with All-Stars of the Game's Golden Era* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1993).

42. Peter Golenbock, *BUMS: An Oral History of the Brooklyn Dodgers* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1984) and *FENWAY: An Unexpurgated History of the Boston Red Sox* (New York G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1992); Jack Lautier, *Fenway Voices* (Camden: ME: Yankee Books, 1990); John Tullius, *I'd Rather Be a Yankee: An Oral History of America's Most Loved and Most Hated Baseball Team* (New York: Macmillan, 1986); Dom Foraker, *The Men of Autumn: An Oral History of the 1949-53 World Champion New York Yankees* (Dallas: Taylor, 1989) and *Sweet Seasons: Recollections of the 1955-64 New York Yankees* (Dallas: Taylor, 1990); and Rick Talley, *The Cubs of '69: Recollections of the Team That Should Have Been* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1989). Reminiscences of Yankee players constitute one-third of Kubek and Plute, *Sixty-One: The Team, The Record, The Men*.

combines a perceptive history of the Detroit Tigers from 1920 to 1950 with the reminiscences of 17 players from that era.<sup>43</sup> A welcome supplement to the oral histories of players and managers is Mike Bryan's outstanding collection of 54 interviews with men and women representing virtually every phase of baseball operations.<sup>44</sup> Historians have long relied on periodical literature for news and views of the game, but a reporter's quotable quotes are no substitute for the retrospective testimony of eyewitnesses. Oral histories may well prove to be among the most enduring and important contributions to baseball history.

Although historical scholarship turns first and foremost on literary sources, baseball history is neither contained in nor constructed from written words alone. Photographs and other illustrative materials are no less important as primary historical texts. Like historians generally, students of baseball history have relied almost exclusively on the written word to understand the past and, judging from the illustrative material reproduced in books, rarely have searched farther for images than the overused photographic collections of the National Baseball Library in Cooperstown. Numerous "picture books" have appeared since *The Ultimate Baseball Book* (1979) by Daniel Okrent and Harris Lewine first showed the potential of photography for evoking visual empathy for baseball's past as well as documenting the game's physical features. Most are either artistic celebrations of the game or lavish "coffee table" books, but some are indispensable documentaries. Especially valuable are David Voigt's illustrated history of baseball, two marvelous pictorial histories of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century by John Thorn and Mark Rucker, Marc Okkonen's illustrated chronicles of two twentieth-century decades, and an anthology of 205 portraits taken from 1904 to 1942 by John Martin Conlon, baseball's first and finest photographer.<sup>45</sup> Illustrated biographies of Babe Ruth and Ted Williams, featuring images gathered by Mark Rucker, baseball's premier photo archivist, show how effectively photographs can elicit understandings far beyond the ability of the written word.<sup>46</sup>

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43. Richard Bak, *Cobb Would Have Caught It: The Golden Age of Baseball in Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991).

44. Mike Bryan, *Baseball Lives: Men and Women of the Game Talk About Their Jobs, Their Lives, and The National Pastime* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989).

45. Daniel Okrent and Harris Lewine, ed., *The Ultimate Baseball Book* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979); David Quentin Voigt, *Baseball: An Illustrated History* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987); Marc Okkonen, *Baseball Memories 1900-1909* (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, 1992) and *Baseball Memories, 1950-59* (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, 1993); John Thorn and Mark Rucker, *Baseball in the Nineteenth Century* (Cooperstown, NY: Society for American Baseball Research, 1984) and *Baseball in the Deadball Era* (Cooperstown, NY: Society for American Baseball Research, 1986); and Neale McCabe and Constance McCabe, *Baseball's Golden Age: The Photographs of Charles M. Conlon* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993).

46. Lawrence Ritter and Mark Rucker, eds., *The Babe: A Life in Pictures* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1988) and Richard Ben Cramer, Mark Rucker, and John Thorn, eds., *Ted Williams: The Seasons of the Kid* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1991).

## III

Historical research on the professional Negro leagues parallels the work done on white Organized Baseball, but remains distinctive enough to warrant separate consideration. A generation of academics has studied myriad aspects of African-American history, but has shied away from sporting experiences. As a result, research on pre-integration black baseball has been conducted primarily by amateur historians who have approached the subject in uncritical, even celebratory, fashion. Just as the major leagues dominate the study of white baseball, research on black baseball has focused overwhelmingly on the Negro major leagues. At that, coverage is decidedly imbalanced. The Negro National League has received far more attention than the Eastern Colored or the Negro American leagues, and northern teams have been studied much more than southern clubs despite the intriguing influence of Jim Crow on black ball in Dixie.

Researching Negro leagues history is especially difficult owing to indifferent and sporadic coverage by the white and black press respectively; even game accounts are notoriously incomplete and unreliable.<sup>47</sup> But instead of systematic research in archives and in traditional literary sources, historians have relied upon more informal means of obtaining information. Oral histories, most notably John Holway's *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues* (1975) and *Black Diamonds* (1989), are the foundation of Negro leagues histories.<sup>48</sup> Valuable in preserving the firsthand accounts of participants, the interviews generally are concerned more with the personal indignities of segregation and impressionistic assessments of relative playing abilities, especially of blacks vis-à-vis white major leaguers, than with black baseball as a socioeconomic institution. That is largely the result of interviewers failing to ask contextual questions; Negro leaguers, like athletes generally, seem to have had little sense of black baseball beyond the ballpark save for segregation. The historical value of the interviews is compromised by the players' remarkable magnanimity, even to the point of affecting a nostalgic longing for the "good old ballplaying days" that dulls and distorts a sense of the grim realities and burning rage of apartheid.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, photographs are not taken through rose-colored lenses. The realism of segregated baseball is captured in three superb "photographic histories" collectively

47. The eighth edition of *The Baseball Encyclopedia: The Complete and Definitive Record of Major League Baseball* (New York: Macmillan; 1990) broadened the definition of "major league" by printing for the first time career statistics of some 130 Negro league players. The decision to include Negro league statistics is questionable at best as publication carries a presumption of accuracy that is not warranted. The statistics are not only substantially incomplete, but also frequently represent extrapolations without basis in fact. It is instructive that Macmillan does not include annual team records, annual batting or pitching league leaders, or the results of All-Star and postseason championship competition.

48. John Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1975) and *Black Diamonds: Life in the Negro Leagues from the Men Who Lived It* (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1989). Numerous autobiographical articles based on transcribed interviews are scattered throughout periodical literature. Particularly valuable is Stephen Banker's *Black Diamonds: An Oral History of Negro Baseball* (Princeton, NJ: Visual Education Corporation, 1978), a collection of three audio-tape cassettes.

49. See, for example, the autobiography of Wilmer Fields, star pitcher for the Homestead Grays who played in several Latin American countries in the 1940s and 1950s: Wilmer Fields, *My Life in the Negro Leagues: An Autobiography* (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1992).

containing nearly 1,000 photos that poignantly document black ball. The three volumes are truly complementary inasmuch as there are very few photo duplications among them and they attempt to portray black baseball in different ways. The largest (over 600 photos) and most important collection is Phil Dixon's *The Negro Baseball Leagues, 1867-1955*, an award-winning volume which, with its outstanding text and captions, serves as an excellent introduction to the history of Negro leagues.<sup>50</sup>

On balance, our understanding of black baseball history has not progressed appreciably beyond Robert Peterson's pioneering *Only the Ball Was White* (1970), which despite superficial research and analysis remains the standard general history of the Negro leagues, and Donn Rogosin's *Invisible Men* (1983), which relies heavily on the remembrances of ex-Negro leaguers in assessing the culture of black baseball. Where Peterson provides an historical overview of pre-integration players, teams, and leagues, Rogosin uses black baseball "to open a window on black life during segregation" and shows how "the life of the Negro leagues," reflective of the determination and resilience of black society generally, "attacked the "porous" barriers of apartheid "ideologically, economically, and emotionally."<sup>51</sup> That neither Peterson or Rogosin, together the best available assessments of the structure of and life in the Negro leagues, provide documentation for their material, is symptomatic of much of the writing on black baseball. So, too, is the lack of understanding of African-American history generally and black nationalism particularly. By design more emotive than interpretive, most of the historical work to date has provided a sense of the Negro leagues that is more experiential than analytical and presents a truncated (usually white) view of black history along with a presentistic bias that posits integrated baseball as a universally desired objective and unqualified good.

The emphasis on individuals instead of issues in oral histories in part reflects the degree to which the Negro leagues, much more so than the white major leagues, were defined in fact and perception by personalities. That was the case not only because the Negro leagues were less stable and more decentralized than Organized Baseball, but also because black ball players, like prominent athletes of other ethnic or racial minorities, were celebrated as cultural as well as sport heroes. Alas, the biographical sketches of career Negro league players are invariably hagiographic and rest heavily on the subject's personal reminiscences. Typical of recent biographical writing is John Holway's *Josh and Satch*, a superficial year-by-year dual chronicle of the playing careers of Josh Gibson

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50. Phil Dixon with Patrick J. Hannian, *The Negro Baseball Leagues, 1867-1955: A Photographic History* (Mattituck, NY: Amereon House, 1992). *Less comprehensive in coverage*, Bruce Chadwick, *When the Game Was Black and White: The Illustrated History of the Negro Leagues* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1992) creates sense of playing and watching black ball. Robert Retort, *The Pictorial Negro League Legends Album* (New Castle, PA: R. D. Retort Enterprises, 1992) exclusively uses sepia photographs to effect visual nostalgia.

51. Robert W. Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: 1970), and Donn Rogosin, *Invisible Men: Life in Baseball's Negro Leagues* (New York: Atheneum, 1983), p. 32.

and Satchel Paige.<sup>52</sup> Save for Joseph Moore's *Pride Against Prejudice*, a well researched and thoughtful life of Larry Doby, whose appearance with the Cleveland Indians in 1947 made him "the Jackie Robinson of the American League," the black pioneers of integration who starred in the white major leagues have not received scholarly biographies.<sup>53</sup> The absence of serious biographies of Roy Campanella, Monte Irvin, and Don Newcombe is surprising, but the lack of a single, scholarly, comprehensive life of Jackie Robinson is shocking. The insipid treatments of Robinson by Maury Allen, *Jackie Robinson*, and Harvey Frommer, *Rickey and Robinson*, point to the pressing need to fill one of the most serious voids in baseball historiography.<sup>54</sup>

There is also a critical need for serious studies of the owners upon whose political acumen and financial connections the fortunes of the Negro leagues rested. The prime candidate for a scholarly biography is Andrew "Rube" Foster—star player, owner-manager of the Chicago American Giants, and founder of the Negro National League in 1920—who is deservedly known as the "Father of Black Baseball." Uncritical, sometimes partisan, and too reliant on local sources, chiefly the *Chicago Defender*, Charles Whitehead's *A Man and His Diamonds* (1980) is nonetheless an excellent introduction to the public career of the dominant figure in Negro league baseball during the first third of the twentieth century.<sup>55</sup> Jim Overmyer's *Effa Manley and the Newark Eagles* (1993) makes good use of team financial records in fashioning a revealing "business biography" of the woman who "unstintingly bucked racial and gender prejudice" while operating one of the Negro league's most important franchises during the 1930s and 1940s. Although often more descriptive than analytical and excessively narrow in focus, to wit, the relationship between the Eagles and Newark's growing black community, Overmyer's excellent contribution underscores the importance of biography understanding the intensely personal world of Negro league baseball.<sup>56</sup> Would that others follow his lead with studies of such

52. John B. Holway, *Josh and Satch: The Life and Times of Josh Gibson and Satchel Paige* (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1991). William Brashler's popular and sympathetic *Josh Gibson: A Life in the Negro Leagues* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978) remains the best life of a black ballplayer before integration. Typical of the biographical treatment of Negro leaguers are Art Rust, Jr., "*Get That Nigger Off the Field!*" (New York: Delacourt Press, 1976); James A. Riley, *The All-Time All-Stars of Black Baseball* (Cocoa, FL: TK Publishers, 1983) and *Dandy, Day and the Devil* [Ray Dandridge, Leon Day, and Willie Wells] (Cocoa, FL: TK Publishers, 1987); and John Holway, *Blackball Stars: Negro League Pioneers* (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1988).

53. Joseph Thomas Moore, *Pride Against Prejudice: The Biography of Larry Doby* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988).

54. Maury Allen, *Jackie Robinson: A Life Remembered* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1987) and Harvey Frommer, *Rickey and Robinson* (New York: Macmillan, 1982).

55. Charles E. Whitehead, *A Man and His Diamonds: The Story of the Great Andrew (Rube) Foster, the Outstanding Team He Owned and Managed, and the Superb League He Founded and Commissioned* (New York: Vantage Press, 1980). A chronicle of Foster's activities as head of the Giants and Negro leagues administrator with little attention to his private life, Whitehead's book, based upon an unusually well-researched master's thesis in Inner City Studies at Northeastern Illinois University in 1975, has not received the recognition it deserves. However, his complaint (p. xi) that several historians of the Negro leagues borrowed silently from the unpublished manuscript appears to be well-founded. Thanks to Steve Riess for calling my attention to Whitehead's book.

56. Jim Overmyer, *Effa Manley and the Newark Eagles* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1993), p. viii.

influential figures as Gus Greenlee and Cum Posey, operators of the cross-town Pittsburgh Crawfords and Homestead Grays respectively; J. L. Wilkinson, the white owner of the Kansas City Monarchs; and Tom Wilson, whose peripatetic Elite Giants migrated from Nashville to Cleveland to Columbus to Washington, D.C., and finally to Baltimore.

Contemporaries and historians alike have focused on players to the neglect of black baseball as a business and expression of community. Team histories, whether of Negro league franchises or barnstorming clubs, are critical for understanding black baseball. As multi-million dollar operations, ball clubs represent a highly visible component of black commercial enterprise during segregation; as expressions of community, they reveal much about the social and cultural dynamics of African-American apartheid. Histories have recently been written of two of the best-known Negro League franchises, but each is suggestive rather than definitive. Literally a team history, James Bankes's *Pittsburgh Crawfords* consists primarily of biographical sketches of star performers. Largely a rehash of familiar Negro league history, Janet Bruce's well-researched *Kansas City Monarchs* only cursorily examines the inner workings of the club and its relationship to Kansas City's black community.<sup>57</sup> By contrast, Overmyer's biography of *Effa Manley* offers a detailed look at the operation of the Newark Eagles and a compelling if abbreviated examination of the club's role in black Newark.

Black baseball is too important a chapter in baseball history and too important a venue for exploring what Gunnar Myrdal termed "the American dilemma" to be the subject of cursory research and uncritical writing. Fortunately, Rob Ruck's superb study of African-American sport in Pittsburgh, *Sandlot Seasons*, is model for future research in black baseball. In addition to careful analyses of the ownership and operation of the city's two Negro league teams, the Crawfords and the Homestead Grays, this impressively researched study views baseball from the perspective of Pittsburgh's several black communities as well as the broader urban experiences of the city as a whole. Assessments of the role of professional baseball in African-American communities typically rest on assertions and assumptions, but Ruck evenhandedly and directly relates the accomplishments and failures of black baseball in Pittsburgh to the socioeconomic realities within and without the black community. He effectively explores the ways in which sport, baseball in particular, "energized" black consciousness in the city after the migrations from the South in the initial decades of the century by serving as a catalyst for cultural expression, community self-identity and cohesion, socioeconomic class interaction, and racial pride during the 1920s and 1930s. What makes Ruck's work especially valuable is his treatment of baseball within the context of other black sports instead of in isolation and the integration of Organized Baseball in terms of the black community's loss of control over its

57. James Bankes, *The Pittsburgh Crawfords: The Lives and Times of Black Baseball's Most Exciting Team* (Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown, 1991) and Janet Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs: Champions of Black Baseball* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1985).

sporting life instead simply as providing long-overdue opportunities. Ruck also provides a welcome corrective to the romanticized and exaggerated view of black baseball characteristic of most work on the subject, noting candidly that black baseball was influenced more by external (often white) forces than by the local community itself, that Gus Greenlee and Cum Posey were hardly paragons of sporting or civic virtue, and that “numbers” instead of baseball was the most popular (and important) game in town.<sup>58</sup> As Robert Peterson noted: “Negro baseball was at once heroic and tawdry, a gladsome thing and a blot on America’s conscience.”<sup>59</sup>

I

Studies of black baseball have provided important insights into the African-American experience, but it is important to remember that black ball clubs, unlike black churches, were not institutionally or operationally community specific. More than the ball was white in Negro league baseball. White owners, bankers, businessmen, politicians, promoters, journalists, and even umpires were key operatives. Properly formulated, the history of black baseball, separate but not isolated, involves the study of culture and community both black and white as well as racial attitudes and race relations, including the interracial relationships, largely informal and functional, that transcended the formal barriers of racial segregation.

Such is the import of Jules Tygiel’s *Baseball’s Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy*, arguably the best baseball book of the past decade. Less a biography than a study of the racial integration of Organized Baseball, Tygiel analyzes the process of desegregation in the minors as well as the major leagues, examines the various forces and voices within black and white America leading to integration, and assesses the effect of integration on the Negro leagues. Apart from meticulous research and cogent analysis, what sets Tygiel’s study apart is historical context. In contrast to the usual emphasis on Branch Rickey and other members of the white power elite in bringing blacks into baseball, Tygiel accords primary recognition to the persistent and courageous efforts of African-Americans, especially sportswriters such as Joe Bostic and Wendell Smith, and political leftists who pressed long and hard for integration. He covers familiar ground in detailing the stubborn and often venomous resistance with which many whites, including ballplayers like Ben Chapman, fought the “noble experiment,” but breaks new ground with a critical yet empathetic assessment of the multiple, often ambivalent, paternalistic, and self-serving motives of Branch Rickey and others instrumental in dropping the color line. And he makes it abundantly clear that few whites, proponents or opponents of integration alike, appreciated or understood the experience and perspective of black America. In the end, his is not so much a study of racial integration in sport as a powerful and poignant study of the racism and discrimination within and without white professional baseball before and after Jim Crow died at second base in 1946. As

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58. Rob Ruck, *Sandlot Seasons: Sport in Black Pittsburgh* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

59. Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White*, p. 15.

Tygiel succinctly put it: “An examination of the forces that led to Robinson’s hiring, the reaction among both blacks and whites, the institutional response of the baseball establishment, and the resulting decline of Jim Crow leagues reveals much about the United States in the 1940s and 1950s.” To his credit, Tygiel tells this dramatic story with remarkable balance, save for an occasional and perhaps unavoidable overstatement as to the importance of Robinson’s achievement for the civil rights movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Indeed, the book leaves no doubt that the baseball industry has posted a sorry record of racial integration on and off the field or that the integration of baseball was less as “a direct agent of social change” and “model of peaceful transition” than a portent of an impending struggle. Scholars will argue as to the degree to which the events of 1946-47 “transcended the realm of sports, influencing public attitudes and facilitating the spread of the ideology of the civil rights movement,” but none will dispute that Tygiel’s is holistic history at its best—a study of the racial integration of baseball within context of race relations in American society.<sup>60</sup>

Separate from Organized Baseball for a half-century before Jackie Robinson broke the modern color line in 1946, professional black baseball historically was intimately connected with baseball in Latin America. Prior to integration, American blacks played in Latin countries, primarily in winter leagues, while Latinos came to the United States to play on white teams if light-skinned and on black ball clubs if of a darker hue. The involvement of African-Americans in Latin baseball and the participation of Latinos in black baseball has received modest attention in studies of the Negro leagues, but the experiences of the significant numbers of Latin American nationals in Organized Baseball as well as the role of baseball in Latino communities in North America has yet to receive book-length treatment. On the other hand, the recent proliferation of Latin stars in both major and minor league baseball has piqued interest in Latin American baseball in general and the Dominican Republic in particular.

Unsatisfying alone but compelling in tandem are two unconventional books on baseball in the Dominican Republic published in 1991, Alan Klein’s *Sugarball* and Rob Ruck’s *The Tropic of Baseball*.<sup>61</sup> The books cover much the same ground—the introduction of the baseball to the country, the influence of the military and sugar cane industry on the sport’s development, the game’s pervasive impact on Dominican culture and politics, and the ways in which the national pastime of the Dominican Republic and the United States affect relationships between the two countries. They also ask the same question: Why has a recreational import from the “colossus to the north” had such

60. Jules Tygiel, *Baseball’s Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. viii, 9. For contrast, see Harvey Frommer’s simplistic *Rickey and Robinson: The Men Who Broke Baseball’s Color Barrier* (New York: Macmillan, 1982).

61. Alan M. Klein, *Sugarball: The American Game, the Dominican Dream* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), and Rob Ruck, *The Tropic of Baseball: Baseball in the Dominican Republic* (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1991). The nature and extent of Ruck’s research is uncertain as the book contains neither footnotes nor bibliography.

a powerful effect on Dominican society? The books differ radically, however, in methodology. An historian, Ruck analyzes baseball from the perspective of political history, while Klein, a professor of sociology and anthropology, frames his study within the analytical confines of dependency theory—a cultural dialectic between “hegemony” (international and capitalist) and “resistance” (local and popular). Both capture wonderfully the special flavor and character of Dominican baseball, Ruck through oral histories (especially valuable is his discussion of the Cocolos, British West Indians whose affinity for cricket carried over into baseball) and Klein through ethnographic analyses of the Campo Las Palmas, the baseball academy operated by the Los Angeles Dodgers, and Santo Domingo’s Quisqueya Stadium. While suffering from overreliance on oral interviews and a penchant for substituting rhetoric (Ruck) and jargon (Klein) for rigorous analysis, their work cojoined constitutes a compelling cultural anthropology of baseball in the Dominican Republic.

Klein and Ruck’s work is a clarion call for studies of baseball in other Latin American countries. The lone general survey of the subject, *Beisbol: Latin Americans and the Grand Old Game* by Michael and Mary Oleksak, a superficial study based on secondary sources, is a reminder that baseball is not a sporting universal in Latin America.<sup>62</sup> Instead, the game is confined to the Caribbean basin, and even there its appeal is uneven. Baseball is a national passion in Cuba and Puerto Rico, but not in Barbadoes and Jamaica. It is wildly popular in Venezuela, but not in the Guianas. The game flourishes in Panama and Nicaragua, but not in Guatemala and Costa Rica. And the island of Hispaniola is shared by baseball-playing Dominicans and soccer-playing Haitians. North Americans are prone to formulate universal notions of Latin American baseball instead of distinguishing among the varieties of baseball in Latin America. The popular sporting press has focused on Dominican baseball in recent years, but for scholars the most important topics for baseball research are histories of the game in Cuba, Mexico, and Puerto Rico.

Notwithstanding the obvious distinctiveness of baseball as sport, business, and cultural institution among countries, little historical research has been done on the game outside the United States and Latin America. The paucity of attention paid to baseball in Canada, whether membership in U.S. professional leagues or native Provincial circuits, is surprising given the game’s initial appearance at about the same time as in the United States.<sup>63</sup> More surprising is the neglect of baseball in the Far East, especially in beisu boru-crazed Japan. Robert Whiting’s sociocultural studies *You Gotta Have Wa* and *The Chrysanthemum and the Bat*, along with important

62. Michael M. Oleksak and Mary Adams Oleksak, *Beisbol: Latin Americans and the Grand Old Game* (Grand Rapids, MI: Masters Press, 1991). Although much publicized, John Krich, *El Beisbol: Travels through the Pan-American Pastime* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989) is a poorly executed “log” of the author’s visits to ballparks from Mexico through Central America to Venezuela that offers little of substance about Latin American baseball or baseball in Latin America.

63. William Humber, *Cheering for the Home Team: The Story of Baseball in Canada* (Erin, Ont., Canada: Boston Mills Press, 1983), a beautifully illustrated “historical scrapbook,” is suggestive of the rich opportunities in Canadian baseball history.

autobiographies by Sadaharu Oh, Japan's "Babe Ruth," and Warren Cromartie, one of the *gaijin* (foreigners) who starred in the Land of the Rising Sun, illustrate the pervasive importance of baseball in Japanese culture.<sup>64</sup> However, there are no scholarly histories of the Japan Pro-Baseball League, divided since 1950 into the Central and Pacific leagues, or any of its franchises, let alone a comprehensive history of baseball in Japan. As evidenced by Japan, where baseball historically has been more openly commercial, to wit corporate ownership of professional teams, and predominantly amateur, to wit the national high school tournament played annually on the "sacred soil" of Koshien stadium, international histories of baseball provide important opportunities to study the distinctive role of the sport in diverse national cultures as well as obtain transcultural perspectives of the game itself.

Among the ways in which baseball in the United States differs historically from other countries is the significant participation by women since the creation of the game. Nevertheless, research on women in baseball lags far behind the study of women in other sports. Women have been most conspicuous as non-playing personnel in professional ranks and as players in amateur and semipro ranks, but historians, the vast majority of whom are non-professionals, have focused their attention on the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. Organized as a hybrid softball circuit in 1943 and transformed into a baseball league just prior its demise in 1954, the AAGPBL affords unique perspectives on the sports industry during and immediately after World War II as well as women's athletics. Unfortunately, no serious histories of the AAGPBL and its more important franchises have yet appeared.<sup>65</sup> The first general history of the league, Lois Browne's *Girls of Summer*, is journalistic in the worst sense and perpetuates negative stereotypes of female athletes. The best introduction to the AAGPBL to date is Diane Helmer's *Belles of the Ballpark*, the story of the Racine Belles, the league's first champion. Although written for a juvenile audience, the book exhibits scholarly qualities in terms of research and analysis and is especially effective in analyzing the double standards imposed on female ball players.<sup>66</sup> Because of limited and restricted participation, biography is the primary means of understanding the history of women in baseball before World War II. Barbara Gregorich's *Women at Play*, a series of finely crafted biographical vignettes of umpires and executives, AAGPBL players and barnstormers,

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64. Whiting, *You Gotta Have Wa* (New York: Macmillan, 1989) and *The Chrysanthemum and the Bat: Baseball Samurai Style* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1977); Sadaharu Oh and David Falkner, *A Zen Way of Baseball* (New York: Times Books, 1984); Warren Cromartie and Robert Whiting, *Slugging It Out in Japan: An American Major Leaguer in the Tokyo Outfield* (Tokyo and New York: Kodansha International, 1991). For the perspective of an American player's family, see Jean and Joe Stanka, *Coping with Clouters, Culture and Crisis* (Wilmington, DE: Dawn Press, 1987).

65. The ninth edition (1993) of Macmillan's *The Baseball Encyclopedia* contains a "summary record" of the AAGPBL, but because league records at present are "extremely sketchy," the volume includes only annual season finishes and an alphabetical listing of players sans statistics. Research on the history of the AAGPBL is facilitated by the extensive newspaper coverage accorded the league and the collection of league records in the Northern Indiana Historical Society in South Bend.

66. Lois Browne, *Girls of Summer: In Their Own League* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992). and Diane Helmer, *Belles of the Ballpark* (Bookfield, CT Millbrook Press, 1993).

semipro and Little Leaguers, is also a valuable prospectus for future research.<sup>67</sup> The history of women in baseball is far more important than the number of actual participants would seem to suggest. Just as the history of black baseball involves the study of broader issues of race in America, so, too, the study of women in baseball entails investigating a wide range of gender issues within and without the world of sport.<sup>68</sup>

#### IV

Whether the subject is the major or minor leagues, separate spheres for blacks and women, or baseball outside the United States, historians have focused almost exclusively on professional baseball, especially major league baseball.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, much of what passes for baseball history concerns only major league baseball and is presented without qualification as though “baseball” and “major league” were synonymous. Apart from the attraction of glamour and popularity, there is an historical rationale for emphasizing the big leagues: Unlike all other major American team sports, and unlike the game elsewhere in the world, professional baseball, most notably major league baseball, gained cultural primacy in the United States long before the amateur and semipro games. Consequently, professional baseball has shaped fundamentally how Americans have played and thought about the game. Still, baseball in America as both a spectator and participant sport has always been primarily non-professional. It is fitting, therefore, that Harold Seymour’s third and final baseball history, *Baseball: The People’s Game*, is a pastiche of exploratory chapters about non-professional baseball as played before World War II by “college players, members of the armed forces, industrial players, semipro, blacks, women, Indians, town team players, and softballers.”<sup>70</sup> Many people were disappointed that Seymour chose not to complete the final volume of his projected trilogy of baseball’s history, but he in fact wrote a much more important book. Based on prodigious reading and research and grounded upon the fundamental truth that there is a vast and variegated world of baseball outside Organized Baseball that is more important socially and culturally than the professional

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67. Barbara Gregorich, *Women at Play: The Story of Women in Baseball* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993).

68. On the virulence of sexism in baseball, see Pam Postema and Gene Wojciechowski, *You’ve Got to Have Balls to Make It in This League: My Life as an Umpire* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

69. Indicative of the obsession with major league baseball, the Senior Professional Baseball Association received more attention than warranted by its abortive two seasons solely because it was a refuge for ex-big leaguers. See Peter Golenbock, *The Forever Boys: The Bittersweet World of Major League Baseball as Seen Through the Eyes of the Men Who Played One More Time* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1991), and David Whitford, *Extra Innings: A Season in the Senior League* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

70. Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The People’s Game* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. v. See also Joel Zoss and John Bowman, *Diamonds in the Rough: The Untold History of Baseball* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), a sprightly written and substantively researched compendium of eclectic essays that is highly suggestive of potential research projects.

game, *The People's Game* is both an admonition to those who have followed his lead in studying baseball history and an agenda for future research.<sup>71</sup>

The overemphasis on professional/major league baseball is symptomatic of a more fundamental historiographical problem-fragmentation. With few exceptions, baseball histories not only examine a single category of baseball, but also do so in vacuo. It has become *de rigeur* to link in some fashion baseball history with non-sporting developments in American society, but only rarely are connections made among the varieties of baseball. Even Seymour missed this point in *Baseball: The People's Game* by using the metaphor of the "house of baseball" to show the variety of "tenants" residing therein. The metaphor is apt, but the more accurate analogy would be that the "house of baseball" consists of a variety of distinctive rooms that are interconnected to form a functional environment for the family of baseball.

That historians have shown little interest in studying baseball within the context of state and local history contributes to fragmentation. Ruck's comparative study of black professional and sandlot baseball in Pittsburgh is restricted in scope, but reveals the potential of community studies of baseball. More broadly, *The Jersey Game* by James DiClerico and Barry Pavelec, baseball buffs in the best sense of the term, explores the full range of baseball history in the Garden State from the Knickerbockers's excursion to Hoboken in 1845 to the 1915 Newark Peps of the Federal League, from the Negro leagues to the minor leagues, and from adult amateur ball to Little League.<sup>72</sup> Overly ambitious in scope and lacking in analysis and historical context, this impressively researched study contains much new information on baseball in New Jersey and illustrates the value of integrating varieties of baseball into a unified history of the game.

The state of baseball historiography is writ large in Charles Alexander's *Our Game: An American Baseball History* (1991) and Benjamin Rader's *Baseball: A History of America's Game* (1992). Published a year apart, the first scholarly single-volume surveys of the game's history have much in common. Despite inclusive titles, both are primarily concerned with major league baseball, mainly the white version, in the United States. Both approach baseball as a game, as a business, and as a sociocultural institution. As works of synthesis, they tell a familiar story that reflects the strengths and weaknesses of previous research in the field. Alexander and Rader each examine the historical development of baseball on and off the field, but differ significantly in emphasis and purpose. In writing a book that "would interest baseball-lovers of all kinds [yet] be sound enough to satisfy specialists,"

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71. Suggestive of the kinds of studies envisioned by Seymour is Thomas K. Perry, *Textile League Baseball: South Carolina's Mill Teams, 1880-1955* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1993). In view of excellent studies of the playground movement, it is noteworthy that youth baseball, especially Little League, has been left to coaches, parents, and sociologists. See, for example, Bill Geist, *Little League Confidential* (New York: Macmillan, 1992) and Gary Alan Fine, *With the Boys: Little League Baseball and Preadolescent Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

72. James M. DiClerico and Barry J. Pavelec, *The Jersey Game: The History of Modern Baseball from Its Birth to the Big Leagues in the Garden State* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

Alexander, biographer of Ty Cobb and John McGraw, emphasizes the game and its persona, especially for the twentieth century. While wearing his scholarly cap, Alexander writes from the stands, forthrightly stating: "Much of what I know about events in baseball history over the past forty-five years comes from personal observation and recollection—in other words, from being a fan." Rader, while not forgetting his enthusiasm as a fan, writes from the study and assiduously incorporates the research of scholars within and without the field of baseball history. Concerned less with the game itself than "baseball's relationship to American society," he describes his book as "a history of baseball's culture, meaning: thereby the story of continuity and change in the game's rules, organizations, habits, customs, skills, and interactions with the larger society."<sup>73</sup>

Apropos their subtitles, *Our Game* and *Baseball* exemplify the historiographical bifurcation dividing historians who write about baseball: *Our Game* is a "baseball history," while *Baseball* is a "history of baseball." Neither author pays much attention to players and games when discussing the nineteenth century, but Alexander dwells upon the institutional development of professional baseball while Rader delineates the relationship between the ethos of the game and American society. Rader probes the demise of the National Commission and the creation of a strong Commissioner in 1920, while Alexander details the Black Sox: Scandal. Alexander recaps pennant races and postseason competition, while Rader examines the factors that made some teams consistently more successful than others. Rader analyzes the labor (player and umpire) disputes that erupted in the 1960s, while Alexander describes them. Their respective treatment of the so-called "dead ball era" clearly illustrates the primary difference between the two books. Rader refutes the long-standing theory that "trick" pitches, especially the "spitball," were primarily responsible for the lower batting averages during the first two decades of the twentieth century and points to there being no appreciable difference in the Earned Run Averages of spitballers and other pitchers. Instead, he attributes the decline in offensive productivity to better fielding, greater use of relief pitchers, widening the newly designed home plate by five inches in 1900, counting as strikes the first two foul balls (NL 1901, AL 1903), and, most important, using taller and heavier and harder-throwing pitchers in response to lengthening the distance from home plate to the pitching rubber to 60 feet, six inches in 1893. In contrast to Rader's inclusive analysis and original research, Alexander relies on conventional wisdom in attributing the dominance of pitching over hitting partly to improved fielding and the foul-ball rule, but "mainly" to "a variety of 'trick pitches' . . . led by the spitball." He notes the changed configuration of home plate without mentioning its enlargement and ignores both the greater use of

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73. Charles C. Alexander, *Our Game: An American Baseball History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1991), p. x; and Benjamin G. Rader, *Baseball: A History of America's Game* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. xvi.

relief pitchers and the significantly increased size of pitchers.<sup>74</sup> The strengths of Alexander's narrative history is descriptive detail and emphasis on the personalities and performances that, after all, are baseball's fundamental attraction. The strengths of Rader's work, more an extended analytical essay, is a perceptive analysis of and context for the game and its place in American history. It is instructive that the index to *Our Game* is restricted to proper names, while *Baseball* indexes names and topics. In short, there's more baseball in Alexander and more history in Rader; both are scholarly, but the latter is more academic.<sup>75</sup>

Alexander and Rader are easily the best available one-volume histories of baseball, but general readers are more likely to pick up *Baseball From a Different Angle*, coauthored by historian William Miller and veteran sportswriter Bob Broeg, or *Baseball and the American Dream* by sportswriter Joseph Durso.<sup>76</sup> While neither book makes any pretense at being a comprehensive history, based on extensive research, or scholarly in any sense, these anecdotal chronicles have a virtue beyond readability: The authors know baseball and evoke a sense of and feel for the game and its participants so frequently lacking in the work of academics. Broeg and Durso are not students of history, but they are students of the game. Professional historians understandably, and to my mind correctly, regard on-field performances as being less significant than the broader societal factors affecting the development of baseball, but they must not lose sight of the fundamental fact that baseball history is important precisely because of the ways the playing of the game has excited the sensibilities of generations of Americans. Baseball is more than a game, but it remains first and foremost a game. Transforming the game into commercial entertainment does not remove its fundamental appeal as sport: Whoever would write the history of baseball had better know the dynamics and nuances of the game.

## V

The past baker's dozen years constitute the formative period of academic baseball history. Professional historians have had a profound impact on baseball historiography by integrating the study of baseball into the discipline of history and producing seminal studies that have contributed new insights and understandings of both the game's development and the larger American historical experience. Academic studies have also provided analytical models for serious nonprofessionals, who increasingly have broadened both the scope of their research and historical context of their studies. Important aspects of baseball history have received scholarly study for the

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74. Alexander, *Our Game*, pp. 90-91; Rader, *Baseball*, pp. 87-89.

75. For a detailed and penetrating comparison of these two important books, see Frederick Ivor-Campbell, "In Just One Volume," *The Cooperstown Review: The Forum of Baseball Literary Opinion*, I (1993), pp. 47-53.

76. Bob Broeg and William J. Miller, Jr., *Baseball From a Different Angle* (South Bend, IN: Diamond Communications, 1988); Joseph Durso, *Baseball and the American Dream* (St. Louis, Mo: The Sporting News, 1986).

first time, and the overall quality of baseball historical writing has never been higher. Still, a survey of recent baseball histories leaves one simultaneously impressed with both the quality of the work that has been done and the quantity of important work that is yet to be done. Numerous significant topics for future research are self-evident, but the general characteristics of recent historical writings are the most instructive signifiers of research needs and opportunities. Despite the intrinsic merit and valuable contributions of individual studies, baseball history in general has been too exclusive in coverage, restricted in scope, formalistic in approach, and fragmented historiographically.

Baseball history is far more diverse and complex than the extant literature would suggest. The preoccupation with, professional baseball, particularly the white major leagues, and the penchant for studying single varieties of the game in isolation, appreciably distorts the history of baseball in the United States. The minor leagues and all manner of amateur baseball as well as pre-integration black baseball and the roles of women demand proper inclusion in the annals of the game. To understand fully the historical development of baseball and the linkage between the game and cultural imperatives and socioeconomic issues, historians will have to act upon, not just quote approvingly and partially, Jacques Barzun's famous aphorism: "Whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball, the rules and realities of the game and do it by watching first some high school or small-town teams."<sup>77</sup>

Similarly, the scope of research must be broadened. Baseball histories have focused unduly on the experiences of greater New York City. Persisting until the Giants and Dodgers departed for California in 1957, the disproportionate attention accorded New York badly skews perspectives on the national pastime, especially for the nineteenth century when Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago exerted primary influences on the development of game after the Civil War. Despite the "nationalization" of baseball in post-war America, the growth of the game in regions outside the Northeast and Upper Midwest has received scant notice. The emergence of baseball in the New South, with its juxtaposition of an emerging entrepreneurial ethos and a traditional apartheid social order, and the Far West, with its social fluidity and accelerated growth patterns, are especially intriguing areas for study. Finally, the dictum "all history is ultimately local history" applies to baseball. Comparative studies, whether intraregional or inter-sectional like Riess's study of Atlanta, Chicago, and New York, are needed to appreciate the local variations on national themes, and studies of the role of baseball in racial and ethnic communities are central to understanding the nature and appeal of the National Pastime.<sup>78</sup>

77. Barzun, *God's Country and Mine* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1954), p. 151.

78. Baseball in black communities has received considerable attention, but studies are lacking of the game's import to other racial and ethnic groups. Suggestive of possibilities are Gary Ross Mormino, *Immigrants on the Hill: Italian-Americans in St. Louis, 1882-1982* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Gary R. Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); and Pat Adachi, *Asahi: A Legend in Baseball* (Don Mills, Ontario: Japanese Canadian Culture Centre, 1992), a photographic and biographical "scrapbook" of a Japanese team in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Baseball histories are excessively formalistic, dealing far more with the structure and operation of baseball than with the intrinsic import and meaning of the game itself. Studies of baseball outside the United States invariably emphasize the ways in which the game reflects and shapes culture, but the relationship between baseball and American culture remains elusive. Descriptive accounts of the game's development and restatements of prescriptive literature will not provide an understanding of baseball in the United States as, say, Klein and Ruck have done for the Dominican Republic. Baseball is both an historical reality and a cultural representation: at least as important as knowing the history of baseball in America is understanding what Americans historically have made of baseball. The symbiotic relationship between baseball myth and baseball reality is clearly revealed in James Vlasich's study of the creation of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.<sup>79</sup> In studies separated chronologically by a century, Warren Goldstein and Bruce Kuklick tread common ground in probing popular perceptions, attitudes, and feelings about the game. Studies of baseball's central core and examinations of the culture of baseball—expressions of the game in music, film, literature, and diverse other aspects of culture high and low—are essential to comprehending the game's persistent popularity as a sport and pervasive influence as a compelling cultural artifact.<sup>80</sup>

Baseball historians have been more concerned with writing histories than history. With few exceptions, past events are analyzed without reference to any coherent sense of the historical process or historiography. (That is not surprising inasmuch as American academics generally have a pathological aversion to intellectual coherence that scholars in the rest of the world find inexplicable.) Absent unifying themes or analyses, baseball history appears both fragmented and static-fragmented because isolated studies make comparative analysis difficult and static because the remarkable continuity in the playing of the game over the past century has overshadowed profound changes in the structure and operation of the sport. All too common is the depiction of baseball's past as simply the present writ small. The frequency of historiographical *déjà vu* is unwarranted: There were, for example, far more dissimilarities than commonalities in the labor-management controversies of the 1880s and 1890s and the seemingly similar disputes a century later. Warren Goldstein's efforts to bring a semblance of order to baseball (sport?) historiography through the notion of competing "linear" and "cyclical" interpretive models is especially important. That both formulations are implicit in Bruce Kuklick's study of the real and imagined Shibe Park suggests that baseball history is necessarily an amalgam of the structural and experiential just as the game itself is a combination of work and play.

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79. James A. Vlasich, *A Legend for the Legendary The Origin of the Baseball Hall of Fame* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1990).

80. Zoss and Bowman, *Diamonds in the Rough*, contains several wonderfully exploratory essays about baseball and popular culture. Cultural historians will find inspiration as well as assistance from recent reference works on film and literature. Hal Erickson, *Baseball in the Movies: A Comprehensive Reference, 1915-1991* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992), supplements Gary E. Dickerson, *The Cinema of Baseball: Images of America, 1929-1989* (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1991). An excellent bibliography of baseball fiction is Andy McCue, *Baseball by the Books* (Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown, 1991).

Ironically, the lone discernible trend in recent academic literature serves to discourage the study of baseball history. The distinction between “baseball history” and “the history of baseball” on the basis of whether the study’s principal focus is the annals of the game or “larger” societal issues minimizes the importance of the academic study of baseball history. The biformity is specious: Every book about baseball done well is necessarily about more than the game, just as every good military history is about war and more. How much “more” depends on subject matter. A study of the racial integration of baseball must necessarily be linked more broadly to non-sporting aspects of American society than a study of baseball’s farm system. To contend that the structure and persona of baseball per se are not “historically significant” is disingenuous when library shelves groan with academic tomes written about individuals and institutions from other walks of life with little or no discernible historical importance. Besides, historical significance is relative: Ty Cobb had no meaningful impact on the course of American history, but was crucially important to the history of baseball. Adelman is correct: individual sports have unique internal dynamics and histories and thus are appropriate subjects for scholarly inquiry. Baseball is not merely a mirror of society or simply a medium for investigating historical issues. If baseball is worth studying at all, it is worth studying in its own right.

The baseball history/history of baseball dichotomy is basically an effort by professional historians to invest their work with an aura of greater authority and higher quality than that of non-professionals. Academic histories are not “a distinct body of baseball literature.”<sup>81</sup> Adherence to scholarly canon is not an exclusive characteristic of academic histories. Extensive research, critical analysis, and historical context are simply the qualities that distinguish history from antiquarianism. That academics have no monopoly on scholarly history is evident in novelist Eliot Asinof’s *Eight Men Out*, a carefully researched and cogently argued study of the fixed 1919 World Series, and Jim Overmyer’s insightful institutional biography, *Effa Manley and the Newark Eagles*.<sup>82</sup> In the end there are only good and bad histories; the critical issue is not the degree to which historical studies involving baseball relate to “larger” issues in American society, but the degree to which those studies follow scholarly canon in answering important historical questions about baseball.

Regrettably, academics are not always as scrupulous in applying the canon to baseball history as to more conventional studies. Biographies of baseball personalities generally are not based upon as exacting research and analysis as the lives of other public figures. Alexander, for example, relied exclusively on the *Detroit Free Press* for local information on Ty Cobb, when a very different sense of Ty and the Tigers emerges from the city’s other two dailies, the *News* and *Times*, and declined to use psychoanalytic theories in evaluating “a deeply flawed, fascinating personality,” because “psychobiography” has not “greatly

81. Jules Tygiel. “Playing by the Book: Baseball History in the 1980s,” *Baseball History*, 1 (Winter 1986), p. 8

82. Elliot Asinof, *Eight Men Out: The Black Sox and the 1919 World Series* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963). See note 56 above.

advanced our understanding of people we can know only historically and therefore only fragmentarily.”<sup>83</sup> Baseball histories are frequently derivative and accept at face value contemporary newspaper reports. Scholars who take pains in assessing the historical context of baseball are prone to draw freely and uncritically upon previous accounts of the game. The consequences are twofold. First, baseball books are descriptively repetitious; compare, for example, the accounts of events in Rader’s *Baseball* with Alexander’s *Our Game*. Second and more serious, is the perpetuation or commission of errors. Kuklick’s otherwise excellent work on Shibe Park is riddled with inaccuracies that betray unfamiliarity with baseball and the North Philadelphia environs. Fact-checking baseball books is a lost art. Finally, scholars do not always employ the range of methodologies necessary to treat adequately their subjects. Riess’s *Touching Base* effectively uses relevant interdisciplinary perspectives and techniques, but Alexander’s understanding of Cobb would have been enhanced by the use of psychoanalytical perspectives just as Miller’s understanding of the Orioles’ pursuit of pennants and profits would have been increased by oral histories and greater familiarity with principles of economics and business management. Harold Seymour, whose impeccable works of scholarship lack scholarly apparatus, said it best: “Baseball warrants the same level of treatment which the professional historian has applied to other areas of America’s past.”<sup>84</sup>

In truth, academics frequently regard baseball history, probably because of its popularity, as a genre with less demanding research expectations than “traditional” topics. Indeed, it is common for scholars to issue a disclaimer stating that their baseball writings are directed to fans instead of “specialists.” There is a difference between academic and popular literature, but “scholarly” and “popular” are not necessarily exclusive categories. Symptomatic of the problem is Harvey Frommer’s *Primitive Baseball*, a brief overview of the game prior to 1900. The impossibility of doing full justice to the subject in a brief book written for a popular audience is a given, but the myriad factual errors and elementary misunderstandings—including the inaccurate subtitle—are not.<sup>85</sup> Frommer is not a trained historian, but he is an academic. The inescapable conclusion is that Frommer did not take seriously the task of writing for general readers. In reviewing Frommer’s book, Gene Murdock issued a powerful admonition to all who would chronicle baseball’s past: “Anyone who undertakes the writing of serious history should research his subject in painstaking fashion.”<sup>86</sup>

For all the impressive work by professional historians over the past decade, it is apparent that baseball history is not yet ready for prime time research and writing in academia. Many scholars remain skeptical, if not contemptuous, of baseball as a proper subject for scholarly inquiry, particularly outside North America. Historians of the Far East and Latin America, whether nationals or

83. Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, p. 6.

84. Seymour, *Baseball: The Early Years*, p. vi.

85. Harvey Frommer, *Primitive Baseball: The First Quarter-Century of the National Pastime* (New York: Atheneum, 1988).

86. Review of Frommer in *The Journal of Sports History* 16 (Winter 1989), p. 300.

North Americans, have shown little or no interest in the study of baseball. Even baseball historians *sui generis* are ambivalent about their work, especially when not clearly linked with non-sport themes. Some minimize or even deny the baseball aspects of their research, while others attempt to legitimize it by strained and gratuitous references to concurrent events outside baseball. And many scholars study baseball history as an adjunct to or break from more conventional projects. Most professional historians have only a “cup of coffee” in baseball history: Charles Alexander, David Voigt, and the late Harold Seymour are among the few academics with a long-term, multiple-project commitment to the field. That prominent baseball historians, more so than practitioners in other subfields, are known more for individual studies than for sustained productivity and cumulative expertise contributes to the notion that the subject is peripheral, as does the fact that rather many baseball histories and biographies seem to be responses to market considerations rather than explorations of topics of fundamental importance to the field. It is disconcertingly true, as Jules Tygiel has pointed out, that “virtually all” academic historians who have written about baseball are “fans and devotees of the game” for whom baseball history is a way of connecting the enthusiasm of youth with the adult professional interests. If being a baseball fan continues to be a prerequisite for writing baseball history, that professional field of dreams has a problematic future.<sup>87</sup>

Baseball history is too important to be left only to historical enthusiasts, professional and nonprofessional alike. Hopefully, the writings of the past decade, which clearly demonstrate baseball’s significance as a conspicuous component of both sport and culture in America, will attract academics from all subfields of American history. As baseball history passes from the special province of scholars with emotional attachments to the game to a subject attracting research for reasons of intellectual curiosity and historical importance, the contributions to the field will increase dramatically and baseball history will be assured of its proper place in the realm of academic inquiry. It is vitally important that academics write not only detailed and closely argued studies of baseball directed principally to scholars. Baseball history, much like the history of the American West, represents a rare intersection of academic and public interests. More than any other sport, baseball gives historians an opportunity to impart scholarly perspectives on numerous important historical issues to persons who otherwise would not be exposed to the discipline. If baseball’s popularity affords historians special pedagogic opportunities, it also imposes upon them the special responsibility of writing histories that are readable and reliable as well as faithful to the scholarly canon. Professional historians have made important contributions to baseball history during the past decade, contributions that inform both academics and general readers. Baseball as a subject for serious research is attracting more scholars from more disciplines than ever before. An abundance of exciting opportunities—topical, archival, and methodological—beckon future researchers. The glory days of baseball history lie ahead.

87. Tygiel, “Playing by the Book,” pp. 7-8.