
Baseball as a Microcosm of United States Society

DAVID Q. VOIGT

Albright College

Reading, Pennsylvania 19602

In company with anthropologists, historians of ideas have long been interested in what makes a nation unique and have sought empirically to unbare a nation's character and "identity." Among other institutions sports have been used to analyze a nation's character and to probe the language uniquenesses, the value hierarchies, technological levels, and salient beliefs that make each nation unique.

Using American sports to get at the American national character one finds that the great variety of sports mirrors a people characterized by pluralistic divisions but united by shared values of equalitarianism, individualism and commitment to change. Moreover, the society's commitment to a pecuniary ethic is revealed in the heavy dependence upon commercialized sports and leisure outlets.

As a microcosm of the nation American baseball shows promise as an analytical tool for probing the personality of the American nation. Salient values of equality and indi-

vidualism are much mirrored in baseball history, but the contradictions of these values are reflected in the unequal treatment afforded black and Hispanic players. Similar contradictions are evident in the nation's commitment to free enterprise capitalism. As reflected in baseball, the clubowners brooked no competition from rival major leagues and deeply resented incursions from rival sports. And challenges to authoritarian clubowners are reflected in player strikes and the ultimately successful resort to unionism.

Among other revelations the baseball microcosm shows a society caught up in unresolved tensions over such issues as the primacy of science, magic or religion, restrictive or permissive sex, white supremacy or racial and ethnic tolerance, narcissistic self-fulfillment or the team spirit, chauvinism or international understanding, extreme specialization or generalizing modes of behavior, technological enterprise or human enterprise, and others.